New Development On Mumia's Defense (see page 6)

COMMEMORATOR

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Feds Slam Door on Low-Income Housing

Throw Poor and Minorities into the Street

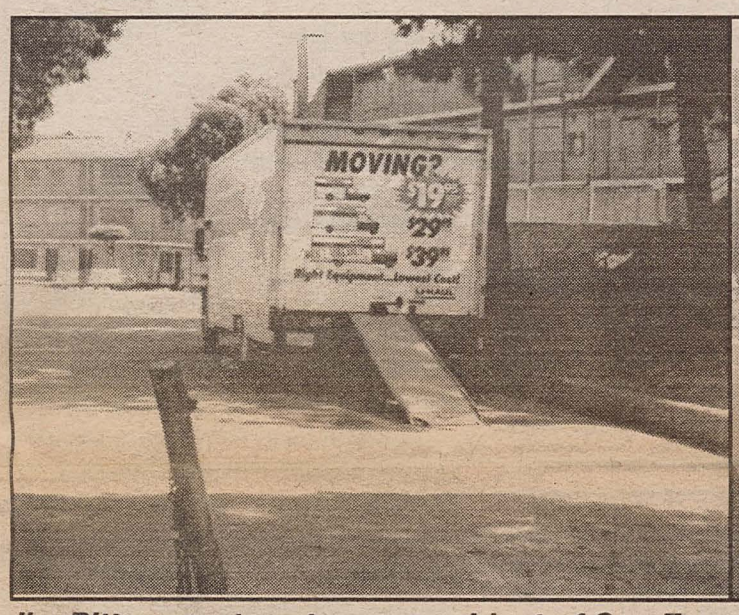

Photo by Charles Slay

Ike Pittman, a twenty-year resident of San Francisco's Hayes Valley, speaks to Raymond Joe,* Commemorator *staff member, about low-income residents forced to relocate out of their neighborhood where town houses are to be built.

by *Commemorator* staff

From Orange County, California, to Pittsfield, Massachusetts, low-income housing designed, built, managed and subsidized by government agencies is being torn down. Thousands of units, allegedly unfit for human habitation, are being partially replaced, as health and safety standards have been relaxed to ease government funded "community development" programs. These programs, however, are aimed at removing the poor, for the profit of speculators and developers, more than for any other purpose.

In many of these communities, ad hoc organizations have demanded the government provide all residents with housing fit for human habitation, and a living wage to pay for it, as promised by every federal housing law since the "Great Depression."

New organizers are stepping forward to fill the vacuum of leadership left by the collapse, twenty-five years ago, of independent organizations that had once shown willingness and ability to fight for the people.

On Sunday, June 1, the last of eight public housing "high-rises" at Columbus Homes was dynamited in Newark, New Jersey, in line with Secretary of the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Henry G. Cisneros' declaration, "The history is clear — high-rises just don't work, and we have to replace them." High-rise residents and community advocates argue that lowering the size and amount of available public housing units will not solve the nation's massive housing problems,

Continued on page 14

Government Refuses Pratt Hearing in Murder Frame-up

Geronimo Update

by Geraldine Clark

On February 26, 1996, former Black Panther Party leader Geronimo ji Jaga's (Pratt) defense attorneys, Johnnie Cochran and Stuart Hanlon, filed a motion to overturn a false conviction for a murder even the government knows Pratt did not commit. Several days later, Los Angeles District Attorney Gil Garcetti was ordered to appear in court on March 28, to respond to the writ of habeas corpus, Pratt's fifth attempt at exposing his frame-up for the 1968 murder of a school teacher in Santa Monica, California.

In a hearing on March 21, in the Los Angeles County Superior Court, Judge Michael Cowell acknowledged the defense motion, saying that Pratt's case would proceed, but gave credence to the District Attorney's "late challenge." Prosecutors sought to delay the case by alleging that it should be heard in the State of California Supreme Court, thus preventing the defense from presenting new evidence that had surfaced since Pratt's conviction in 1972 for the murder of Caroline Olsen in Santa Monica, California.

On April 17, the Los Angeles Superior Court denied the writ, forcing Cochran and Hanlon to appeal the case to the California Supreme Court, which has deferred his case not to be considered again until the year 2000. On April 18, Pratt was returned to Mule Creek State Prison where he was put in lock-down until April 25.

Pratt's case, littered with inconsistencies, looks increasingly as if he has been framed by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and this cover-up has been maintained by the government at all costs.

Approximately one hundred journalists and supporters gathered for the

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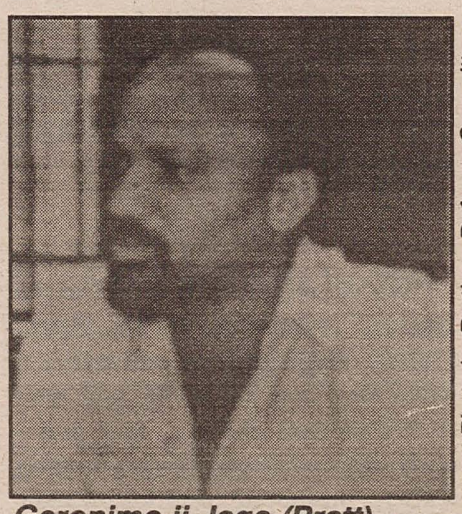

Photo by Partisan Defense Committee

Geronimo ji Jaga (Pratt)

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Editorial

Cuba and the World Say 'Sí' as U.S. and Emigrés Say 'No'

Photo by Reuters

Harriet Babbitt leads the U.S. Organization of American States (OAS) delegation criticizing member nations for voting against President Clinton's signing of the Helms-Burton Law. Signed by President Clinton in March, the legislation has been called a new "get tough policy" toward Cuba after Cuban Air Force pilots shot down two CIA-backed Cuban exile planes in February.

Worldwide News Service

Three planes flown from Florida by Cuban emigré pilots entered Cuban territory on February 24, in violation of U.S. Federal Aviation Administration regulations, despite warnings from the Cuban government and admonishments by U.S. officials. Two were shot down by Cuban government planes. The U.S. has demanded international action against Cuba, but the United Nations has not taken any substantive action, and the World Trade Organization and other international bodies have joined Cuba in protest of the U.S. legislation signed by President Clinton that attempts to impose sanctions against Cuban trading partners holding assets in the United States.

The planes, flown from Miami by members of an organization called "Brothers to the Rescue," had violated the terms of their flight plan, which gave the Bahamas as their destination. Early U.S. government reports acknowledged that the planes had "strayed" from their flight plan and were off course. They crossed the line at 23 degrees north latitude, mutually acknowledged by the U.S. and Cuban governments as the point of departure between the two countries. Crossing that line is as much against U.S. regulations as it is Cuban, inasmuch as the U.S. prohibits any and all traffic and trade with Cuba from the United States and has done so since 1962.

The planes received the usual warning from the Cubans that they had drifted over the line and should go back — which "Brothers to the Rescue" overflights had ignored in the recent past. At that moment, however, the planes were already in violation of American law, not to mention the threat they represented to Cuba, a tiny island nation.

The planes continued to move southward. Cuban planes picked them up and began to track them in earnest, and requested permission to shoot them down, and the request was granted by the Cuban government. Two of the three planes were destroyed.

Mr. Castro recently made a decision to go forward with completion of a nuclear power plant in Cuba to produce energy for domestic use, since the country has no oil reserves and is not allowed to trade for oil with the United States or with companies and countries which comply with U.S. restrictions on Cuban trade. This nuclear power project has made the U.S. government, fearful of socialist expansion and expansion of socialist economic power, furious, along with Cuban-Americans seeking the overthrow of Castro.

Mr. Castro also held the traditional carnivals this year and celebrated the Centennial of the death of José Martí in the Cuban struggle for liberation from Spain, aborted at the very point of victory by the U.S. takeover of the island nation via the Spanish-American war at the close of the 19th century. The celebration had not been held for years because of the emergent conditions in Cuba, and was now being put forward as part of Cuba's attempt to fuel business and attract trade while boosting the spirits of the population.

"Brothers to the Rescue"

The organization "Brothers to the Rescue," composed of anti-Castro Cubans who were disenfranchised when they fled the island, and their American-born children, had previously violated Cuban airspace to drop leaflets promoting sedition, strikes and passive resistance to the Cuban government in Havana. And, in the days before the incident, which caused such a furor in the American press, a member of the Brothers defected to Cuba and informed Mr. Castro's government that planes would be dispatched to drop more leaflets on Havana during the carnivals, when the entire population would be in the streets in celebration.

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Your life is shaped by a thousand things

You are shaped by the linoleum,
the tile on the walls,
the way the bank prints your checks,
your cable TV,
the dime store with 300,000 items
of which you need 2 and could use 8,

by police clubs
or just the fact you see them,
by the shotgun muzzle sitting upright
in a cop's car,
like a skinny doberman

just a phallic reminder
of where the power is.

You are shaped by the funny papers,

by the things in the papers that are not funny,
by things that are funny and should be
in the papers but aren't,

by the things that are not funny
and are not in the papers and should be,

by the things that have been the decisive,
earth-shattering pieces of news

for the last 500 years

and have not been mentioned once.

Sept. 15, 1991.
by Bob Randolph

Opinions and positions taken in articles with bylines are those of their writers. The views expressed in the bylined editorial and opinion pieces published by The Commemorator *do not* necessarily *indicate its endorsement or support. — The Editor*

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Op-Ed

Breaking Black Political Power

by Mumia Abu-Jamal

"The whole history of the progress of human liberty shows that all concessions, yet made to her august claims, have been born of earnest struggle. The conflict has been exciting, agitating, all-absorbing, and for the time being, putting all other tumults to silence. It must do this or it does nothing. If there is no struggle, there is no progress. Those who profess to favor freedom, and yet deprecate agitation, are men who want crops without plowing up the ground. They want rain without thunder and lightning. They want the ocean without the awful roar of its many waters. This struggle may be a moral one; or it may be a physical one; or it may be both moral and physical; but it must be a struggle. Power concedes nothing without demand. It never did, and it never will." — Frederick Douglass.

There is no black political leader in America who does not owe his/her political office to the Black protest and freedom movements of the 1950s, '60s, and '70s. Not one.

It was this Southern-born, and later nationally-grown, Black civil rights and Black liberation movement that provided the political pressure that gave rise to the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which, quite literally, opened the door for Black politicians in the halls of Congress and in statehouses across the nation, some for the first time in a century. Were it not for such movements, such "struggle," there would've been no political power, no "progress."

Those political gains were won at a prodigious, and horrific cost, in pain,

Photo by Partisan Defense Committee

loss, government terrorism, impoverishments, imprisonment and death, suffered by countless known and unknown blacks, in the North and the South.

New generations of politicians, eager to distance themselves from their meager and militant origins, played a political game as if their new-found power was a birthright sneering at the poor, while lauding and embracing the wealthy and established, thus denigrating their very power base.

Anxious to assume the class prerogatives granted by entrée into new realms of power, most politicians forgot from whence they came.

Today we see the fruits of such foolishness and shortsightedness, in the scuttling and crippling of Black political power.

In a matter of months after the Congressional Black Caucus reached a powerful and unprecedented peak of 40 members, and thus a bloc to be reckoned with, White Tuesday, an overwhelmingly white and Republican resurgence, swept those apparent "gains" into history's garbage can, as it realigned the House.

This legislative assault was mirrored by a legal and judicial mugging, which, in the interests of white supremacy, wiped Black majority dis-

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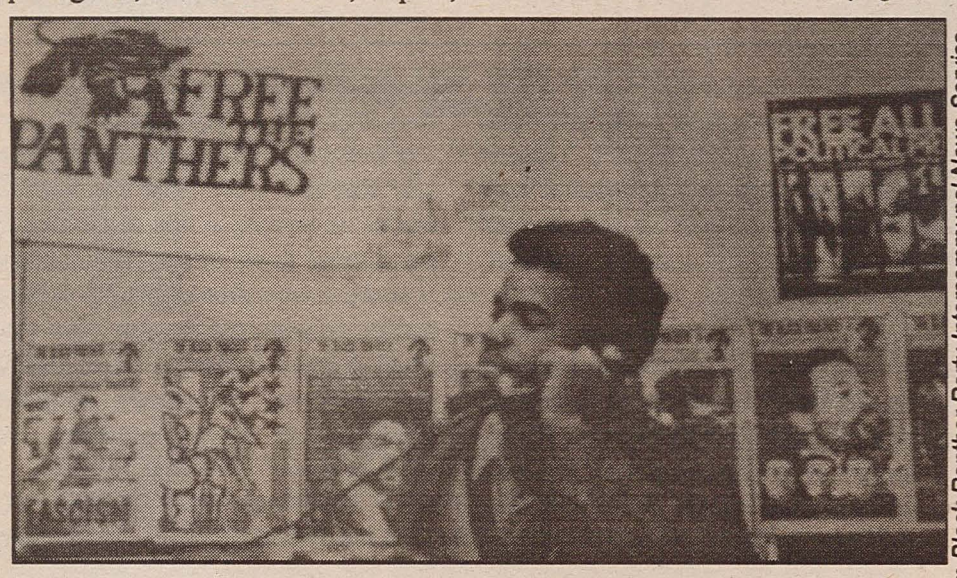

From Black Panther Party Intercommunal News Service

Back in "the day," Mumia functioned as a Black Panther Party cadre.

Conversation with Assata Shakur

by Kenneth Snodgrass

This interview with Assata Shakur (pictured right) took place on May 3, 1995, in Cuba where Shakur lives in exile. Assata Shakur was targeted by the U.S. government because of her involvement with the Black Panther Party and the Black Liberation Army. Six times between 1971 and 1973 she faced trial on charges including murder, but was either acquitted or the charges were dismissed. Convicted of the 1973 murder of a state trooper on the New Jersey Turnpike, Shakur escaped from prison and has lived in exile in Cuba since approximately 1978.

I asked Assata Shakur to pass on any message she may have for the people in the States. The following is her statement:

***Continued from December, 1995 issue of* The Commemorator**

SHAKUR: We live in a country-where sixty-something percent of

Courtesy of Kenneth Snodgrass

Black children are poor, where a third of us, more than a third of us, live under the poverty line.

Civil rights at this moment is almost (you know, we had to fight for them) meaningless because our relationship to the United States government cannot be interpreted as citizens. How can I be a citizen when the government is totally trying to destroy my existence?

What is our relationship to the United States government of America? It is one of oppressor and

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Parole Denied for Geronimo -- Again!

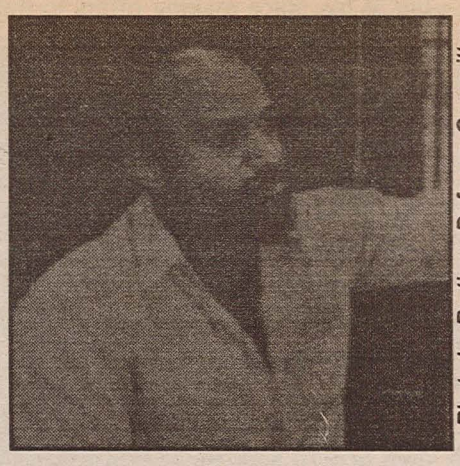

Photo by Partisan Defense Committee

by Mumia Abu-Jamal

Former Black Panther Deputy Defense Minister and longtime political prisoner, Geronimo ji Jaga (Pratt) has once again been savaged by the government of California, as parole was again denied in mid-March 1996.

Geronimo, a documented target of the infamous FBI COINTELPRO (Counter Intelligence Program) operation, the very files and agents of which insured his absolute innocence, has been caged in government dungeons for almost a quarter of a century.

Since the mid-to-late 1960s, the FBI, hyped by the late J. Edgar Hoover's claims of Black Panther "danger" to the American Republic, dogged the heels of every Panther of any significance.

Geronimo, as a high-ranking member of the Defense Ministry, was more significant than most. Therefore, his phones were tapped, and paid government informants put in reports on his movements.

Government officials swore Geronimo and another man killed a white teacher in 1968, in Los Angeles.

There was only one problem.

The FBI knew, based on wiretaps, agents and informants that Geronimo was in Oakland, California, some 300 miles away from the murder scene on the day and time of the killing, and therefore, innocent.

Retired FBI agent, Wes Swearingen, swore that he heard the FBI Case Officer say of Geronimo: "That son-of-a-bitch was up in Oakland!"

When Swearingen searched for the files, he found something he never saw in his 25-year career — missing files! Someone had "cleaned" the files.

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Letters to the Editor

Inventor Never Received a Dime for His Life's Works

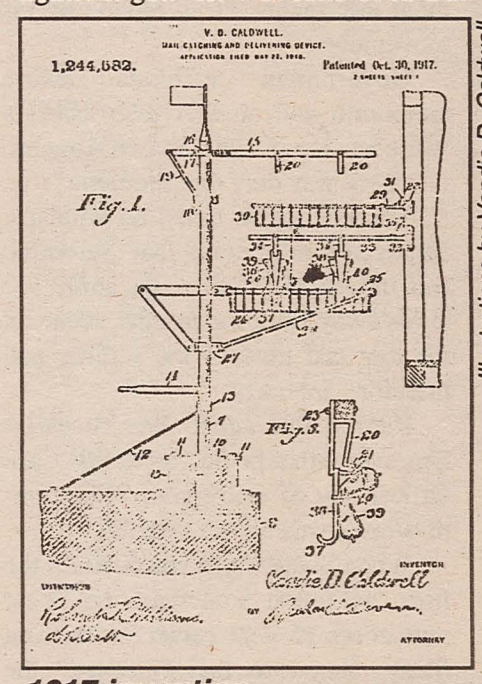
Dear Melvin:

I am keeping my word, I promised to send this information back to you.

This is a copy of the invention my father [Vandie D. Caldwell] invented and was fooled out of because he did not have the education or the know-how to protest his rights. He told me a lawyer and a tool company had told him to let them have a copy of the patent and give them the name of the bank he wanted them to deposit the money in. They quoted a sum that they would pay for it. He complied. He sent the patent and request to them, and waited to hear if the money was being deposited as promised. He did hear from them after a period of time. They returned the patent and said they were sorry it didn't come up to their expectations. But not long afterward, his patent would be used by railroads throughout the country. It is the arm that reaches out for mail and the train didn't have to stop to distribute it.

I have seen it used on railroads in foreign countries, in some of the old movies.

There's a story he told that led him to his inventions. My father said he went to school three days in the 3rd grade. But he had a God-given talent in a lot of things. I remember him taking a piece of new tin, cutting it, and shaping it into a belt buckle; the one you see the military use. He used a 10-penny nail, cut the ridges in the tin, got a piece off the mule's belly band and the more the belt pulled, the tighter it got. He was fond of it. But



Illustrations by Vandie D. Caldwell

1917 invention

Courtesy of Ms. Willie Richard

Vandie D. Caldwell, brilliant inventor, invented the railroad's mail catching and delivering device, among other inventions.

at the time, living in the country around harvest time, drummers, as they were called, came out selling their goods. We had a large place, and a lot of times they would lodge under the trees in front of our place. My father got a joy from displaying his inventions, and the military belt-buckle he invented he talked about patenting but didn't. But someone did.

The same happened to the first cotton chopper my father invented in his blacksmith shop down in Baukiela. He had gadgets hooked on his tractor. He worked the chopper with the gadget as he drove his tractor along and the chopper was chopping. It's a long story. Farmers in the area were coming to his place making offers to buy it. He dismantled it, and said it was not exactly the way he wanted it to work, but before he could totally dismantle it, a young man from the town of Marshville, Louisiana, had seen enough to get the idea. In two or three years, he came up with a patent for the invention. My father did a lot of brilliant things in his blacksmith shop, not knowing that he had to have a patent.

A lot of things he did were for his own benefit and use. I don't want to write anymore but I could tell the stories. My father was never paid a dime for any patent, but he is in the archives as an inventor. I am told that he is in the libraries but not in the history books. The railroad was a very essential part of America, but my father was not recognized as part of it.

Willie L. Richards

From the Editor:

Black working people have never been given their rights, but, more importantly, working people of every color have had invention after invention stolen from them by large corporations owning the financial power, both to put them into production and to hire professionals to secure their ownership interest toward their continued profiteering.

We at the Commemorator *know that the laws of patents, trademarks, copyrights and trade secrets are used by those who own the means of production to set prices and to separate working people from the money they work so hard to earn. Far from enabling creative workers to profit from their ideas, these laws discourage those activities, which is one reason that the U.S., once the world's leader in invention, has stagnated in the closing years of the 20th century. It is these laws that allow the highest bidder to separate people from that which belongs to them — their history, their literature, their poetry, academic achievements, artistic creations and their political doctrines, as well as their inventions. ALL POWER TO THE PEOPLE!*

HUD's Unparalleled History of Fraud and Deception

Dear Editor,

I am an avid reader of the *Commemorator,* and I want to thank and commend you on your publication, especially on your coverage of the case and the plight of Mumia Abu-Jamal. I have noted that the *Commemorator* has consistently carried his writings, not only reporting on this most blatant instance of injustice, but exposing the mechanics of oppression, long before the recent media-hosted outcry attempt to present this as isolated phenomena. The insulated may elect to await the proper time.

Thousands of legal and medical professionals and millions of American citizens turn to whatever device or distraction they need to keep their sanity, faced with the daily travesty of contradictions in constitutional condition. Others bide their time, having learned energy conservation from burn-out and heat exhaustion due to the wrong tactical turn down the same dead-end street with no recourse, because the particular time or tactic was wrong, as opposed to process to progress of on-the-job training in organizing skills through daily involved practice of taking terrain from the other side as apparatus.

Bobby down the street is one of your sponsors. He invited me to such an event — a mass mobilization tactic. I told him we had already done that at the moratoriums nearly 30 years ago. We were 900,000 and they told us to go back home. Back in Chicago, when we were ready to answer the call of Black Panther leadership to join in solidarity, it was too late. Per Mumia's article in your September/October 1994 edition, "Free Fred Hampton Jr.!" they had killed them all. There was a lot of talk back then, a few riots, etc., but "the people" had not yet learned, it seems, how to 'walk the walk' in unity. I had friends die for, or die for the lack of it. The remainder fit into an 'every man for himself' isolation of perpetrated condition.

I knew a man of Mumia's calibre

I knew a man of Mumia's calibre, of Mumia's depth of personal commitment and thirst for truth, also of minority descent. I travelled hundreds of miles in 1981 from Philadelphia to the tiny village of Lyons in upstate New York, to join the defense of Abraham Rodriguez, president of the Citizens Committee to Save Water Street.

I remember, after years of fighting it out in the courts from an isolated geographic location, we were sent an official publication from the west coast with an article written by a would-be journalist who came off as being intimately knowledgeable of the situation. I knew she was lying. She said all his friends called him "Abe," but the only ones I heard call him that were on the other side in the fight. We all called him Abie.

Abie Rodriguez was framed for arson, charged with having burned one of the buildings he was fighting to save. The building happened to be owned by a Brooklyn lawyer who had set down roots in Lyons Village, and according to court-ordered testimony of six Village Fathers under oath, this man, Anthony Villani, had coordinated the work of procuring a HUD

Continued on next page

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Letters to the Editor

Continued from previous page

Community Development Block Grant, supposedly for the purpose of benefiting low-income and minority residents in the Water Street and Broad Street area. Villani, who was the Village's part-time counsel, had the foresight to switch to an out-of-town insurance company, weeks before the fire, to triple the fire insurance on his building.

They said Abie had done it, but he'd been working at the cannery that night. Then a guy named Buddy Mann, an employee of the Village attorney, stepped forward to confess he had set the fire. This, after a gunshot had been fired through his windshield. But he claimed that Abie had paid him to do it. Tapes were produced by FBI agents as "evidence," which were ruled inadmissible by a state superior court.

Where they still burn crosses

In the Village of Lyons, they still burn crosses on the canal across from Riverside Apartments, which were built on swampland for low-income and minority residents. The Village Fathers said the people on Water Street could go and live there, after $50,000 of HUD money was used, under Mr. Villani's direction, to cite landlords for hundreds of thousands of dollars of code violations, with 30 days to repair, or empty the buildings of people and businesses. Citizens Committee to Save Water Street was formed as the landlords joined with the tenants, who had nowhere to go but back to the migrant labor camps. They chose Abie to head it, as the most vocal in the group, and the fight to save Water Street was on.

A senior citizen, disabled war veteran, live-in landlord was carted away in an ambulance in the middle of the night, after police threw his dog from a second story window, and he was terrorized into selling his building for a dollar. Residents were told to go to Social Services for relocation housing, but Social Services said they didn't have any. So, the first picket line in Lyons history was begun outside their doors.

A migrant camp, where farm workers stayed who had joined the line, was shot up one night with an M-16, and one farm worker killed. Some growers' boys fire-bombed an occupied Water Street building. They implied to the judge that their intent was murder, but they were let go.

The Citizens Committee and attorneys working pro bono filed a historic federal lawsuit against HUD and the Village of Lyons, *Heimbach v. Pierce,* to obtain recourse against official harassment and forced relocation, and just compensation for their losses and violations of their civil rights.

Abie was evicted from his legal residence on Water Street by hundreds of paramilitary troops and a SWAT Team from Buffalo, who had cordoned off the block in full view of Water Street residents, who saw automatic weapons being trained on them from behind police barricades. Unarmed, Abie came out laughing with an ACLU observer. He spent the night camped out in the office of the Sheriff in protest of his enforced homelessness. They showed him a nice house and said he could have it if he forgot about the other people on Water Street, but he refused. That's when the arson frame-up began.

Photo by AP/Wide World

Former Housing and Urban Development (HUD) director, Samuel J. Pierce (center), and former Philadelphia Mayor Goode (left), view the community site, Osage Avenue, where police laid siege of MOVE headquarters in May, 1985, by dropping a bomb on it, causing a firestorm that destroyed the neighborhood.

Similarities to Mumia's Fight

As I read and listen to accounts of Mumia's fight, I can't help noticing the similarities with Abie's case — a confirmed terrorist used as the key witness, the problems with defense attorneys and the attempt at self-representation in order to put the real criminals on trial. Abie fired his assigned public defender, after the attorney advised him to cop a plea, even though he was innocent. Out of necessity, he opted to represent himself, but the judge still denied his right to make an opening statement and to state his case. The judge reassigned the fired attorney to "assist" Abie in his defense anyway, turning the trial into a three-ring circus. Meanwhile, the jury marched past the scene of the crime every day before entering the courtroom, and again on their way home.

One of the proposed jurors stated for the record he could not sit there with an open mind because, he said, "I never knew Buddy Mann to tell the truth when he could tell a lie."

The guilty verdict in the first trial was overturned on appeal because the prosecution never put Buddy Mann on the stand. At the second trial, in return for his testimony as the only witness against Abie, Buddy served a short hitch at Allenwood, Pennsylvania federal prison, known as a "piece of cake," where they had sent the Watergate criminals.

Abie was given a six to 25 year sentence after being convicted. They kept telling him he could walk if he'd just declare his guilt.

Through organization, Abie applied for a Writ of Certiorari to the U.S. Supreme Court. They refused to hear his case. It would have exposed HUD in the systematic process of decimating our low-income and minority communities across the country, and it would have exonerated an outspoken fighter in the interest of justice for the people, who was not afraid of taking on the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development.

While in prison they continued to try to break Abie, to stop him and his struggle. They committed numerous acts of mental torment, psychological attack and torture on Abie, including psychoactive drugs as "medical treatment."

Lyons Village finally procured the promised HUD money. While the *Heimbach v. Pierce* civil rights lawsuit was (and is) still in litigation, they promptly used the funds to demolish half of the buildings on Water Street. Half a million dollars allocated for sidewalks and street lighting to upgrade the low-income and minority community, was instead used to surround a new block-long county office building with a parking lot after the community had been decimated.

Through organization, residents finally received some monetary compensation, but not as settlement for the constitutional violations of the government. Those lawsuits, begun in 1977, are still in the courts to this day.

Osage Avenue community bombed

In Philadelphia, MOVE had come to national attention as a result of the bombing of the Osage Avenue community, but had much earlier begun a series of lawsuits against police brutality, for which Philadelphia police are unrivaled, attacking the problem at its root: it was not the individual police officers, but those who put them on the street, who are responsible for brutalization as government policy. After the Justice Department put a hold on all the cases, in favor of their own proceedings, the Rizzo Decision ruled that municipalities could not be held responsible. The Heimbach Decision, an outcome of the Citizens Committee lawsuit in Lyons, said municipalities could and should be held responsible.

The Osage Avenue bombing, standing as an attack by government on its citizenry, drew international attention and condemnation. Once again the Justice Department moved in, while the residents were scattered all over Philadelphia. Hundreds of pages of legal writing were produced over several months, registering available dissent, with each finding raising more questions. Every time, the questions were brought by the Philadelphia Fact Finding Committee, begun out of a nationally coordinated relief effort for the uncompensated victims.

The totally unjustifiable actions of the government in the "MOVE bombing," unwarranted by any real or physical danger, were in retaliation for the police brutality lawsuits, as an organized attempt to make government accountable.

Anyone who has witnessed the Philadelphia police force in action in the low-income and minority community cannot doubt the validity of the claims of the lawsuits; the handcuffed shootings, the automatic weapons brazenly displayed by the press, in the hands of police standing in front of low-income housing project buildings, the token black cops stationed there replaced by white cops after dark. I even saw a guy being shaken down in his jogging shorts. It was happening on every street corner of low-income and minority Philadel-

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Want to Get Rich? -- Build a Prison!

Photo by Charles Slay

California cash cow with over 200,000 prisoners, costing taxpayers billions of dollars to maintain, while providing surplus labor to big business, which pay prisoners slave wages, leads the wave of the prison industry in the nation.

By Al Cunningham

With a prison population of 2.4 million, the U.S. is an industrialized world leader in incarcerations. Because present-day politicians are so quick to jump on the bandwagon of "tough-on-crime" issues, we need to understand the economics behind this industry. When you consider the billions and billions of dollars spent in constructing prisons to warehouse prisoners means a strong disincentive preventing crime on the streets, the real crime becomes the prison industry itself.

"It's a tragedy," said California Senate President pro tempore Bill Lockyer, D-Hayward. "We're investing in our mistakes, not our future."

Between 1982 and 1992, $14 billion was spent annually for prisons. California spends more for prisons than it does for its universities. Why? Because prisons make money. There was a time when rural areas fought to prevent prison building in their towns and cities. Now, they compete to have prisons in their towns and cities. Such prisons bring thousands of jobs. USA TODAY reported in 1992 that more than 523,000 full-time employees worked in prisons. With an expansion of jobs like this, the prison system will continue to grow, even if more oppressive laws are needed to produce the people to incarcerate.

In the last 15 years, the numbers of inmates in California prisons have

Continued on page 12

Witness Recants Mumia Murder Testimony

by Melvin Dickson

Mumia Abu-Jamal, former Black Panther Party organizer and a death row political prisoner, recently won the first round against a prison gag order in U.S. Federal District Court in Pittsburgh against Pennsylvania prison authorities. On June 6, U.S. Magistrate Kenneth Benson released his "report and recommendation" on Mumia's case. The ruling by Benson held that prison officials violated Mumia's First Amendment right to free speech by denying him access to reporters, and Mumia's Sixth Amendment right to counsel, by copying and turning over the content of his legal mail to the legal offices of Pennsylvania's pro-death penalty Governor Tom Ridge, who signed Mumia's execution order!

This new round of courtroom battles comes on the heels of new disclosures by key trial witness Veronica Jones, who provided, in May of this year, powerful new evidence of Mumia's innocence. Jones, a newly available eyewitness, signed a statement in which she reveals that days before she took the stand as a witness at Mumia's 1982 trial for the murder of Philadelphia police officer Daniel Faulkner, two police detectives from Philadelphia visited her in jail, where she faced major felony charges for armed robbery, and threatened and coerced her to change her testimony. Bowing to this police intimidation, Jones repudiated her original true statement to the police that she saw two men fleeing from the scene immediately after the shooting.

"Approximately one week before I testified, I was visited in jail by two white plainclothes detectives. I was initially shocked at seeing them, since the jailers had told me my lawyer was visiting. The detectives began by speaking, not of the facts of my case but the case of Jamal. They told me that if I would testify against Jamal and identify Jamal as the shooter, I wouldn't have to worry about my pending felony charges. I repeatedly told the detectives that I didn't see the shooting, but only heard the shot, and then saw two men running away. But this didn't satisfy them. The detectives threatened me by reminding me that I face a long-term prison sentence of fifteen years on gun charges, all the while insisting that I testify to their version of events. Frightened, I told them I wanted my lawyer present. When they finally left, I knew that if I did anything to help Jamal's defense, I would face years in prison.

"It was only a matter of a few days that I was brought to court....Both detectives who had threatened me earlier were in plain view, standing in the rear of the courtroom. When asked by Jamal's attorney to confirm what I had first told the police — that I saw two males running from the scene after the firing stopped — I steadfastly denied it for fear that I would be punished for helping Jamal's defense."

Jury Foreman Petitions New Trial for Ruchell C. Magee

***EDITOR'S NOTE:** As Dr. Huey P. Newton said, "We cannot truly free our political prisoners until we are free," then it is up to friends and relatives of prisoners to unite in the fight against economically oppressed conditions where it is a crime to be poor.*

Ruchell Magee is no exception to this rule. Magee was incarcerated for only a $10 crime, and since then illegally held due to alleged participation in events of 1970 led by the younger Jackson brother, Jonathan, despite a jury finding of not guilty.

With the entire U.S. prison industry rising to unprecedented, economic status, dividing and undermining the working class communities, it is urgent to unite all who are victimized by government policies which benefit the wealthy few.

Magee, recently released from Pelican Bay's notorious Special Housing Unit (SHU) to the general prison population, is a victim of miscarriage of justice. In 1972, Magee was found not guilty of P.C. 209 (kidnapping for purposes of extortion) for the August 7, 1970 "slave revolt" in California, and yet has served over 25 years. The 1972 verdict was suppressed from the public by the California Attorney General's office, under Evelle Younger, and retried again in Santa Clara County (double jeopardy).

Courtesy of Ruchell C. Magee

Ruchell Magee after seventeen years in the notorious Special Housing Unit

In a letter to The Commemorator, *Magee said:*

"I have served 33 years since 1963 on two counts; a charge in Los Angeles County of kidnapping to rob $10, which under the 1976 SB 42 matric, was to be reduced to eight years maximum, and a 1970 kidnapping charge from the Marin County courthouse case for which the sentence was to be reduced to 25 years maximum. So I've served my time."

Of Ruchell's conviction, the foreman of the jury that acquitted him wrote the following letter to the U.S. Supreme Court:

January 22, 1996

Mr. William K. Suter, Respectable Clerk
UNITED STATES SUPREME COURT
1st Street, NW
Washington, DC 20543

Re: In Re Ruchell Cinque Magee, No. 95-6912

Attn: Sandra Day O'Connor, Respectable Justice

I, Bernard J. Suares, was the duly elected foreman of the petit jury selected in the trial of Ruchell Magee.

As jury foreman, I acknowledge the declaration of acquittal referred to as Appendix 10, attached to the Writ of Habeas Corpus (In Re Ruchell Cinque Magee, No. 95-6912), BEFORE THIS COURT.

It is true, as the declaration reads: "All twelve jurors . . . agreed that the defendant was not guilty of the charge of violating P. C. 209 (kidnapping for purposes of extortion)....

Please note, if need be, I can and will provide additional information concerning the juror's verdicts in this matter.

You are requested to hold a hearing in the case at bar to determine the validity of the jury's declaration of acquittal and why the not guilty decision was disregarded or dishonored by the lower courts.

A copy of this letter is served upon Mr. Magee, the petitioner in this subject matter.

Thank you for reading this.

Very truly yours,

Bernard J. Suares
1890 23rd Avenue
San Francisco, CA 94122

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ARCHIVES

Huey's Corner

A Truly Revolutionary Vehicle

A truly revolutionary vehicle which will survive the repression it encounters daily is made up of a number of characteristics. First of all, there is a small but dedicated *cadre of workers who are willing to devote their full time to the goals of the organization.* Secondly, there is a distinct organized structure through which the cadre can function. It is this combination of structure and dedicated cadre which can maintain the machinery for meeting the people's needs. In this way a printing press can be maintained to review the events of the day and interpret them in a manner which serves the people. Information can be circulated about daily phenomena to inform the people of their true meaning. Programs of service can be carried out to deliver to the people the basic needs that are not met elsewhere because the lumpen proletariat are the victims of oppression and exploitation. A cadre and a structure, however, are not what make the political vehicle a revolutionary one. It is the revolutionary concepts which define and interpret phenomena, and establish the goals toward which the political vehicle will work. A revolutionary vehicle is in fact a revolutionary concept set into motion by a dedicated cadre through a particular organized structure.

Such a vehicle can survive repression because it can move in the necessary manner at the appropriate time. It can go underground if the conditions require, and it can rise up again. But it will always be motivated by love and dedication to the interests of the oppressed communities. Therefore the people will insure its survival, only in that survival are their needs serviced. The structured and organized vehicle will guarantee the weathering of the test of internal and external contradictions.

The responsibility of such a political vehicle is clear. It is to function as a machine which serves the true interests of the oppressed people. This means that it must be ever aware of the needs of the communities of the oppressed and develop and execute the necessary programs to meet those needs. The Black Panther Party has done this through its basic Ten -Point Program. However, we recognize that *revolution is a a process and we cannot offer the people conclusions* — we must be ready to respond creatively to new conditions and new understandings. Therefore, we have developed our Free Breakfast Program, our Free Health Clinics, our Clothing and Shoe Programs, and our Buses to Prisons Program as well as others, responding to the obvious needs of Black people.

...

At one time I thought that only Blacks were colonized. But I think we have to change our rhetoric to an extent because the whole American people have been colonized, if you view exploitation as a colonized effect. Seventy-six companies have exploited everyone. American people are a colonized people even more so than the people in developing countries where the military operates.

...

What we are concerned with is the larger problem. Therefore we will be honest and say that we will do like the churches — we will negate our necessity for existing. After we accomplish our goals the Black Panther Party will not need to exist because we will have already created our heaven right here on earth. What we are going to do is administer to the community the things they need in order to get their attention, in order to organize them into a political machine.

...

Because of this new understanding we must ally ourselves with the oppressed communities of the world. We cannot make our stand as nationalists, we cannot even make our stand as internationalists. We must place our future hopes upon the philosophy of intercommunalism, a philosophy which holds that the rise of imperialism in America transformed all other nations into oppressed communities. In revolutionary love we must make common cause with these oppressed communities.

...

It is not enough to rely on the media of the power structure; it is of prime importance that a vanguard party develop its own communications organ, such as a newspaper, and at the same time provide strategic revolutionary art, and destruction of the oppressor's machinery.

All excerpts from To Die For The People, *Dr. Huey P. Newton, Random House, 1972.*

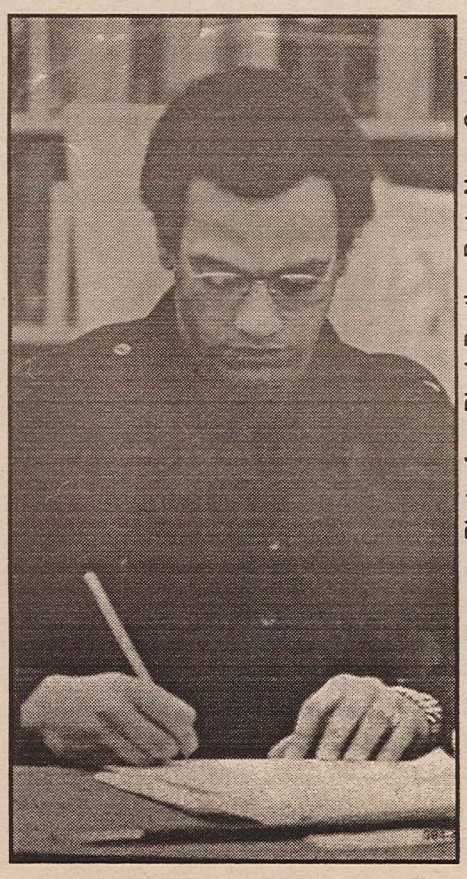

Photo from Black Panther Party News Service

Dr. Huey P. Newton

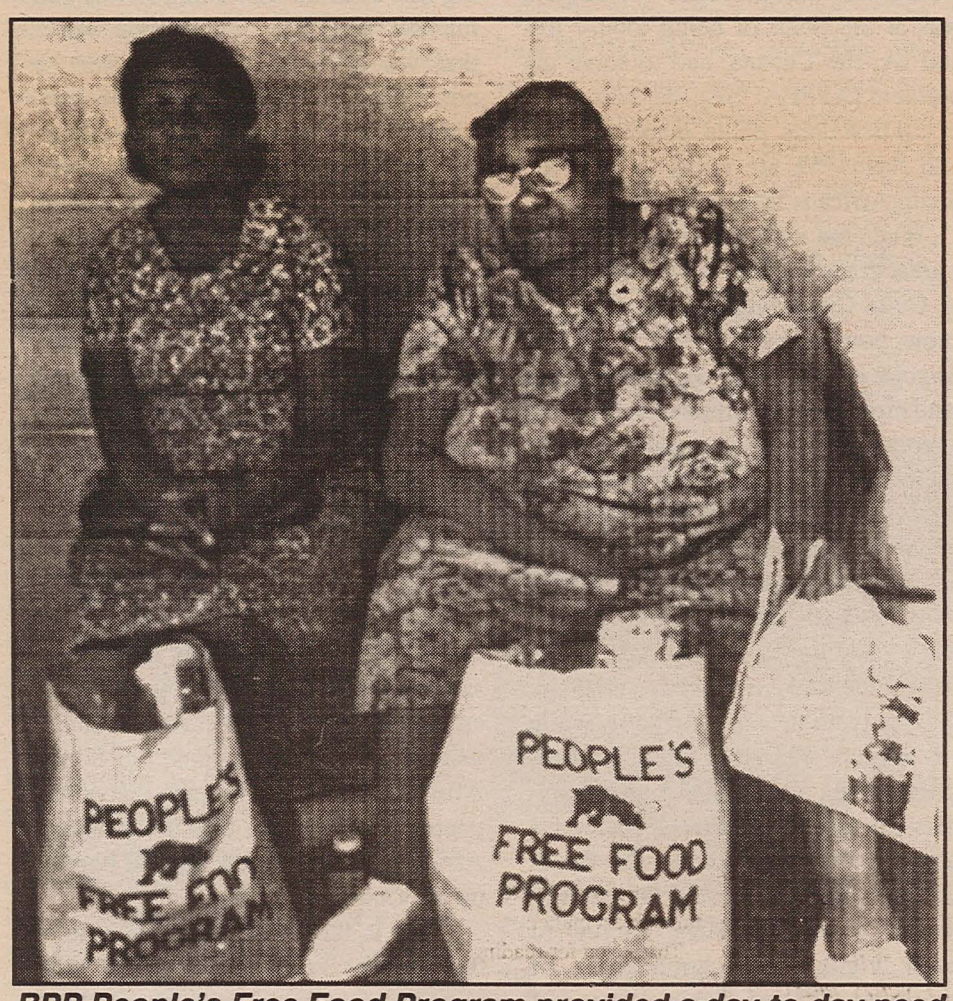

Photo by Black Panther Party News Service

BPP People's Free Food Program provided a day-to-day need to the low-income black community as a demonstration of grassroots organization and community control.

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International Update

President Fidel Castro's Speech in Harlem

(Editor's note: The following is Part Three of President Fidel Castro's speech in Harlem, October 22, 1995.)

I have spoken of what we have donated, our blood to save lives, I have spoken of doctors, of teachers; but we have done something more than that: we have spilled the blood of our compatriots to fight against colonialism, to defend the independence and sovereignty of the peoples. (APPLAUSE AND EXCLAMATIONS OF: "Viva Cuba revolucionaria!") Over 2,000 Cubans sacrificed their lives while fulfilling internationalist missions. But if there is something that fills us with pride and gives us the awareness that we have fulfilled our debt with humanity, it was the 15 years that we fought against South Africa, against racism and apartheid in Angola (APPLAUSE AND EXCLAMATIONS OF: Fidel, Fidel!"). Fifteen years fighting until the end! And what did they do with us? They told us that they blockaded us because we were fulfilling that mission to help there, fighting against the South Africans.

That is a very interesting story, which should be written down some day. One of the most horrible systems of discrimination was that which existed there in that country, decades after the end of fascism, of nazism. Nevertheless, today nothing much is said about that, and we well know the history, we know it well: They didn't blockade South Africa (EXCLAMATIONS), they didn't hinder its buying of food and medicines, and the country that heroically fought against the South Africans, they didn't sell any medicine to it, nor aspirin, nor a slide, that was the penalty.

Today the whole world is happy because apartheid is ended. Today everybody is happy because the independence of Namibia was brought about, and the struggle was rough on the part of the Namibians, Angolans and Cubans (APPLAUSE AND EXCLAMATIONS). To give you an idea, our soldiers were near the border of South Africa, a powerful, rich country, and we, 10,000 kilometers from home, kept up that hard, long fight. That wasn't easy, the international situation; every time that the Angolans began an offensive, the South Africans would intervene. We told the Soviets who advised the Angolan General

Photo from Ebony magazine

After being snubbed by President Eisenhower in 1960, Fidel Castro and Cuban delegation host lunch for Hotel Theresa workers.

Staff there, that those offensives should not take place if the South Africans were not prohibited from intervening, and there was no way, that was not understood yet, until the time that a very serious crisis was created in which the independence of Angola was at the point of being totally lost and we, the Cubans, had to solve the problem (APPLAUSE). We sent many of our best units, pilots, planes, and we told them: We are going to stop the South Africans from intervening.

When the situation arose there was a great crisis and that's when the battle of Cuito-Cuanavale unfolds. Do you know how many men Cuba sent to Angola at that time? Fifty-five thousand men! And all volunteers, the most important thing of all, volunteers! In Cuito-Cuanavale the racists were crushed. They opened the battle to the southeast, a difficult place, and there we placed a trap against which they were crushed, because it became a symbol and they wanted to take it, but we sent the forces needed to stop them, obligate them to smash up there, while we moved 40,000 Cuban soldiers against them, and 20,000 Angolan soldiers toward the southwest to feint a threat in that direction to the South African army. We created the correlation of forces necessary, simply, to reach victory, the application of Resolution 435 and, finally, the end of apartheid, as a contribution to the heroic struggle, a thousand times heroic struggle of the South African people! (APPLAUSE AND EXCLAMATIONS.)

No one talks about that in the United Nations. I heard a great number of speeches, there was talk and applause for the independence of Namibia, that seemed like a work and miracle on the part of the United Nations (EXCLAMATIONS). There was talk of the end of apartheid, work and marvellous miracle from the United Nations. There was not any mention of a single Cuban of those who died in that struggle, not even the name of Cuba was mentioned. See how at times they claim to write history (EXCLAMATIONS)? But what is the more extraordinary? It is that South Africa had become a nuclear power, and we knew it; the deployment of our troops in their advances was made taking into account that South Africa had nuclear weapons. The question was if they would decide to employ them or not, because, finally, who were they going to use those weapons on, against us? And afterward where? Right inside South Africa, apartheid could not be sustained with nuclear weapons.

A book has just been published which is now beginning to circulate where it is stated that South Africa then had dozens of nuclear weapons, nuclear shells, nuclear munitions, a respectable nuclear force, and this has been detailed through the research of a North American and a South African journalist.

Did someone protest? Perhaps it was ignored that South Africa had nuclear weapons? But why did no one say a single word? Why was there not an accusation? Ah, because Cubans were there fighting against the South Africans, and it would seem that some people couldn't care less if the South Africans dropped a few nuclear bombs on the Cuban soldiers.

That is the truth, that is a history that remains to be written, which still must be researched ever more thoroughly, because according to the theory of these writers, fascist groups and South African racists have kept some of those bombs. But that is how history is written, that is how international relations are shaped: certain persons, certain allied countries can manufacture nuclear weapons and it is no one else's business; if it is any other country, as in the case of Korea, which they said was going to manufacture a bomb without any apparent means, a great scandal, almost a war! But they let the South Africa of apartheid and racism reach nuclear capability and have all the weapons that it considered convenient.

Continued on next page

CC &Beyond ART GALLERY

Ph.: (415) 474-0883

August 1996
MEMO FROM: Abdur Rashiyd Abdullah Muhammad
SUBJECT: Art Buying and Selling

My name is Abdur Muhammad. I was incarcerated at the James River Correctional Center from 1990 to 1993. During my period of incarceration, I was privileged, through the will of Allah(God), to see first hand the distinguished works of many artists.

Upon my release, my daughter and I founded CC & Beyond , an art gallery located in San Francisco, California which displays and sells art, including the works of male and female inmates from correctional facilities throughout the country. We purchase art directly and display art on consignment.

We specialize in watercolors, oil paintings and sketches which depict African-American themes. While our concentration is African-American themes, we are interested in other creative artwork.

If you are interested in selling your works or placing them on consignment and would like to know how we can help, please complete and return the attached coupon.

We will gladly provide our operating guidelines as well as contract. We will work with you to make sure that our working relationship is friendly and productive.

Yes, I am an artist and I am interested in receiving more information about CC & Beyond.

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Return this coupon to: Abdur Rashiyd Ibrahim Abdullah Muhammad

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Continued from previous page

Therefore, on speaking of the history of these years of Revolution, I believe that one of the most dangerous and risky and most difficult pages was that which was written in that struggle against racism, against apartheid in South Africa (APPLAUSE), and it was the Namibians, it was the Angolans, and in the world outside of those two countries only Cuba spilled its generous blood for that cause (PROLONGED APPLAUSE).

There are countries were more than 20,000 people disappeared; there is a country in Central America, Guatemala, where more than 100,000 people disappeared, since the mercenary invasion against Arbenz [CIA invasion in 1954], and I don't want to mention all the other countries where there were thousands disappeared and murdered. That never was the case in Cuba (APPLAUSE); but none of those countries was blockaded and Cuba is still blockaded.

That is the historic reality, and we are against all blockades, because, finally, this blockade goes against men, women, children, adolescents, youth, and tends to kill them with hunger, because no blockade has been as strong and as rigorous as the blockade against Cuba. I believe that it is not just to use those weapons, it is not logical because those weapons are against the people (APPLAUSE), there is no reason to use them. They want to prohibit nuclear tests, and we believe that all nuclear weapons should disappear, of course, but what is a blockade? As we said today, it is like a silent atomic weapon that kills the people of a country, the civilians, the non-combatants, it does not have any justification.

If I have gone on, it is for nothing but with the idea of talking a long time here (EXCLAMATIONS). I have gone on because I wanted to meditate, reflect on some of these questions in which I justify the idea that we have known how to be faithful to our principles, and that you, with your gesture recognize that conduct on Cuba's part (APPLAUSE). Here in Harlem I met Malcolm X (APPLAUSE), I met many other personalities. They were difficult days, but a very great struggle was yet to come: the great battles of Martin Luther King for civil rights; the great struggles of the Black, Hispanic minorities, Latin Americans from all over, to better their conditions of living; the struggle of the elderly, the sick, everybody.

I know perfectly well that many of those conquests are today at risk (APPLAUSE), I know that there are some people who want to do away with those advances, I mean completely do away with them; protection for the elderly, the sick, do away with affirmative action, do away with all the great achievements that the poorest people of the United States have won in these years of struggle. Well, I only make a brief reference to that, and I hope that nobody accuses me of anything for that (LAUGHTER).

Around a thousand hours of radio a week is transmitted towards Cuba from the United States, promoting subversion, economic sabotage, assassination attempts. This modest person you see before you has the privilege — and I believe that the church must have something to do with this (LAUGHTER) — of having survived hundreds of planned assassination attempts (APPLAUSE). I believe that your prayers or the prayers that many of you here made, have something to do with that, it must be, since, well, how could it have been possible?

And those plans are still being hatched. I am not blaming the government, but there is a group of the extreme right, fascist, that continues feverishly working to carry out attempts against the economy of our country and assassinations of revolutionary leaders. It remains as before, nobody should imagine that that has changed in reality.

"And those plans are still being hatched."

I was moved by the memory of brother Butts in that regard, when we were in the church there in Vedado, in Havana. I remember that that day I converted into a kind of brother too, because I gave a kind of sermon; I believe even in the style of a sermon. And he remembered more facts, when he asked about my beliefs and what I had replied to him. In all honesty, I just didn't have the luck to have such good pastors (APPLAUSE), that instead of telling me "believe," they would tell me "think," "meditate" and they would bring to my soul the convictions that I did not have the privilege of receiving. I became a priest for causes, and I think that I don't have any contradictions with religious beliefs and the idea of God. (APPLAUSE)

When he spoke, I thought of all these human problems, all the suffering of humanity, and I don't want to

Continued on page 11

Parole Denied

Continued from page 3

One of Geronimo's jurors, Jeanne Hamilton, spoke movingly of the importance of the government's role in the railroading of the man who she sent to prison for life:

"Never, ever in our discussions did we ever talk about the FBI. We had no clue as to their involvement.... The jury was never informed that Mr. Olsen [the victim's husband] had made three previous identifications [of other suspects]. The jury was never informed that the FBI had a COINTELPRO program and targeted Mr. Pratt for 'neutralization.' The jury was never informed that the FBI had wiretapped the Oakland and Los Angeles Black Panther headquarters and had documented evidence that Mr. Pratt was in Oakland at that time. The jury was never informed that the FBI activities had caused a split in the Black Panther Party resulting in members being forbidden to come to Mr. Pratt's defense. And lastly, the jury was never informed that Julius Butler [the state's key witness against Geronimo] was an FBI informant.... If we had known these facts there is no doubt in my mind that we would not have reached a guilty verdict." (Said at press conference, February 26, 1996.)

The state, acting like a super-jury, is doing what a jury should never have done in the first place — cage an innocent man for life.

We all must do our level best to right this gross injustice. Let's work together, to broaden the movement, to FREE GERONIMO NOW!

Southern Correspondent Fights Unconstitutional Subpoena and Wins

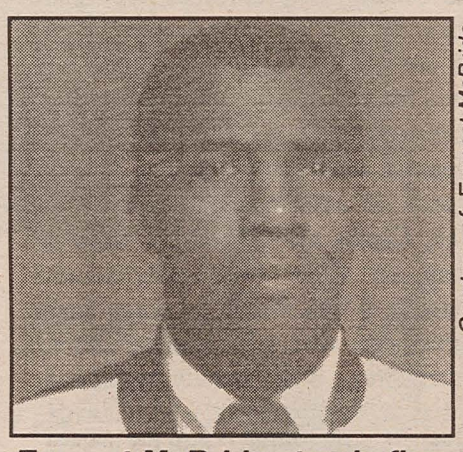
by *Commemorator* Staff

Mississippi civil rights veteran and free-lance journalist Earnest McBride stared down the prestigious Phelps, Dunbar law firm and ended a deposition in a civil lawsuit without giving up information. He fought Phelps, Dunbar lawyers, a federal magistrate and a federal judge to keep his sources confidential under his first amendment right to freedom of the press.

McBride, who serves as the *Commemorator* Southern States Correspondent, had written a story that appeared in the November 2, 1995 issue of Mississippi's *Jackson Advocate* concerning the expulsion of black candidate Henry L. Brinston, Hinds County Deputy Circuit Clerk, from the race against his then-boss Circuit Clerk Barbara Dunn, who Brinston charged with using her influence to get the Election Commission to declare him ineligible to run in Hinds County.

In addition, Brinston said Dunn fired him in retaliation the day of his announcement. Only six days before the November 7 ballots, the state Supreme Court ruled against Brinston. Brinston subsequently filed a civil suit against Dunn.

McBride has insisted since first being subpoenaed January 4, 1996 in



Courtesy of Earnest McBride

Earnest McBride stands firm on First Amendment

the pending *Brinston v. Dunn et al.* case with an order to provide "documents, recordings and notes" relating to his story that he would not provide such information which, he said, is protected under the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution.

"I did not yield one inch," McBride said. "I think it was a rather silly act on the part of the defense lawyers from the Phelps, Dunbar firm. It seemed a very sneaky thing for them to try to get me to give my notes on the man who filed a lawsuit against their client."

The same legal issues severely affected relations between reporters and low-income and minority communities when four Los Angeles police

Continued on page 12

Le Belle's Caribbean Restaurant
presents its First Annual:

Red, White & Black Dinner Dance & Scholarship Awards

In Celebration of Trinidad & Tobago Independence

Entertainment will feature calypso artists **"Gypsy"** and **"Iwer George"** direct from Trinidad & Tobago, with Bay Area's top Caribbean band **"Pan Ecstasy"** and Caribbean folk ensemble **"Calabash."**

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Buffet Dinner: 7pm - 9pm
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Admission: $25.00 by Aug 15
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Scholarship application deadline is August 30, 1996

Proceeds benefit the **Le Belle's** College Scholarship Fund. For ticket and scholarship information, please call 510 652-4668

Government Refusal

Continued from page 1

press conference held on February 26 to announce the filing of the petition to overturn Pratt's conviction. Cochran said Pratt is "a man being held in prison because of his political belief, one of the longest held political prisoners in the United States."

Pratt, a decorated veteran of the Vietnam War, with silver and bronze stars and two Purple Hearts, developed an interest in politics and met Bunchy Carter, then Deputy Defense Minister of the Southern Chapter of the Black Panther Party for Self Defense at UCLA.

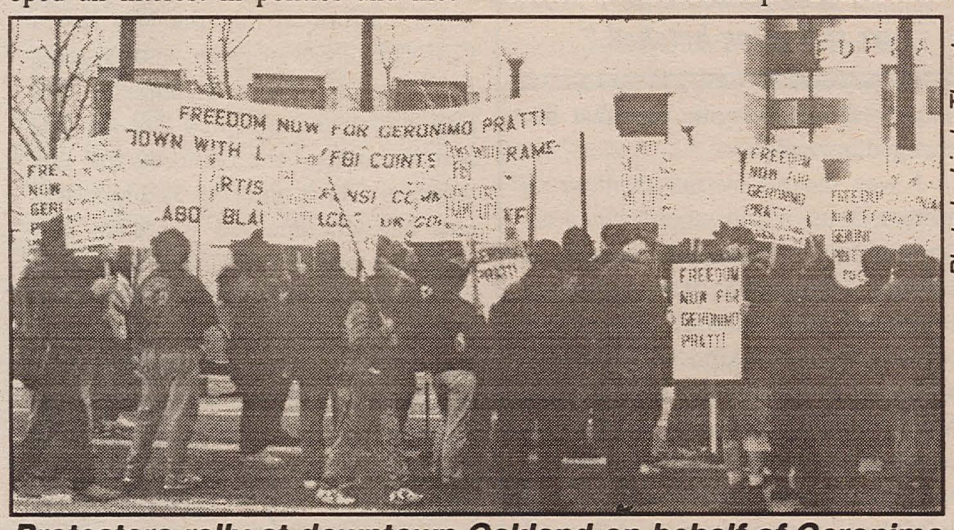

Photo by Linda Thurston

Protesters rally at downtown Oakland on behalf of Geronimo ji Jaga (Pratt), political prisoner, during hearing in Los Angeles County Superior Court.

Pratt's attorney, Johnnie Cochran, who represented him in 1972 and most recently represented the highly media-profiled trial of O.J. Simpson, and Stuart Hanlon — filed a motion to overturn the conviction because of huge discrepancies within the prosecution's case in 1972, and in the face of a gross miscarriage of justice. The petition detailed two decades of disclosures of government misconduct, orchestrated misidentification and perjured testimony against Pratt, who has been denied parole 13 times.

In 1981, a federal court jury found that Pratt had spent eight years in solitary confinement in retaliation for his political beliefs, and that he had endured tireless and brutal harassment in numerous California correctional facilities. It is because of Pratt's unwillingness to relinquish his belief in the BPP movement that he has been a target of government activities for over a quarter of a century.

Pratt became an important figure in the BPP and his military background left him well suited for this position. He was responsible for going to various Party locations and organizing classes on defense. It was these training programs that enabled the BPP to maintain its level of structure, organization and uniformity. However, Pratt's critical work with the Party was not going unnoticed by the FBI. The FBI, under the direction of Director J. Edgar Hoover, started the program COINTELPRO. COINTELPRO was designed "to disrupt, neutralize, and discredit Black Nationalist groups which the Bureau characterized as Black Nationalist Hate Groups." The program targeted such organizations as the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), and the Nation of Islam. Community leaders like Martin Luther King, Jr., Stokely Carmichael II, Elijah Muhammed and Malcolm X were also targeted by this program. In July, 1969, J. Edgar Hoover termed the BPP, "the greatest threat to the internal security of the country," and so the BPP became the primary focus of the COINTELPRO. The FBI's tactics severely impacted the organization and began to take its toll upon its leaders. Members were imprisoned regularly, police raids were orchestrated with the aid of the FBI and informants. Like other BPP leaders, Pratt became a victim of FBI tactics, and his case must not be forgotten. An urgent need exists to spread the word about Geronimo's situation, as we organize to free him through the organizing of the masses for freedom and liberation, to consummate the principles and goals of the BPP as stated in the Ten-Point Program, because this is why Geronimo and many lesser known political prisoners were targeted by the government in the first place.

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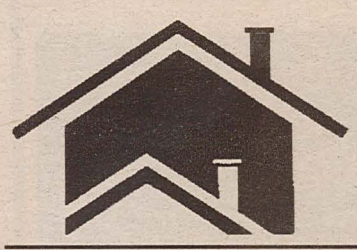

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Cuba & World 'Si' U.S. 'No'

Continued from page 2

Meanwhile, the United States intelligence services have been peppering Cuba with thousands upon thousands of hours of radio propaganda against the Castro government.

To many observers of U.S.-Cuba relations, it seems to be a strategy of continuing to up the ante on Castro, and if he reacts, blame him for the human rights violations.

The U.S. government denied the planes were in Cuban airspace even before they had received the first reports on the incident. A week later, when the Brothers held a memorial service at sea, overseen by the U.S. Coast Guard, they held it miles north of the area where the planes were shot down. They could not legally have held the demonstration where the planes went down without another violation of international law; it was too close to the Cuban shore.

Thirty-four years of U.S. embargo

For more than three decades, the United States has maintained a policy of hostility toward Cuba in the form of an embargo, which means that all trade is subject to confiscation in contemplation of war. However, the single-crop nature of Cuba's economy and its proximity to the United States, coupled with the 34-year duration of the embargo, has made the embargo itself the premier weapon in the war to overthrow Castro and Cuba's socialist regime in order to open up the island once again to the kind of exploitation for which it was famous before the 1959 revolution.

The economic contradiction imposed by the embargo, which only the United States enforces, was postponed by aid from the Soviet Union. In the years since 1991, Cuba has been forced to make its own way economically because the Yeltsin government of the "former Soviet Union" ceased all assistance to Cuba. Since then, Castro has looked for ways to open up Cuba economically and socially. It has sought to make trade agreements with other nations and to enlarge those it has already negotiated. It has a sizable trade with Canada, over a quarter billion dollars a year, for example. Canada, as most other industrialized nations, does not recognize the embargo.

The United States, bent on socialist Cuba's destruction, has opposed every means Cuba has taken to raise revenue by trade.

Mr. Castro has been negotiating with foreign governments, and has been trying to gain a loosening of American restrictions on trade through congressmen in Washington. He recently visited China to gain additional contracts and financial support. He attended the recent 50th anniversary of the United Nations in New York, but was not allowed to attend any of the "social" functions in the company of other heads of state. Instead, he addressed at length a large gathering of supporters at the

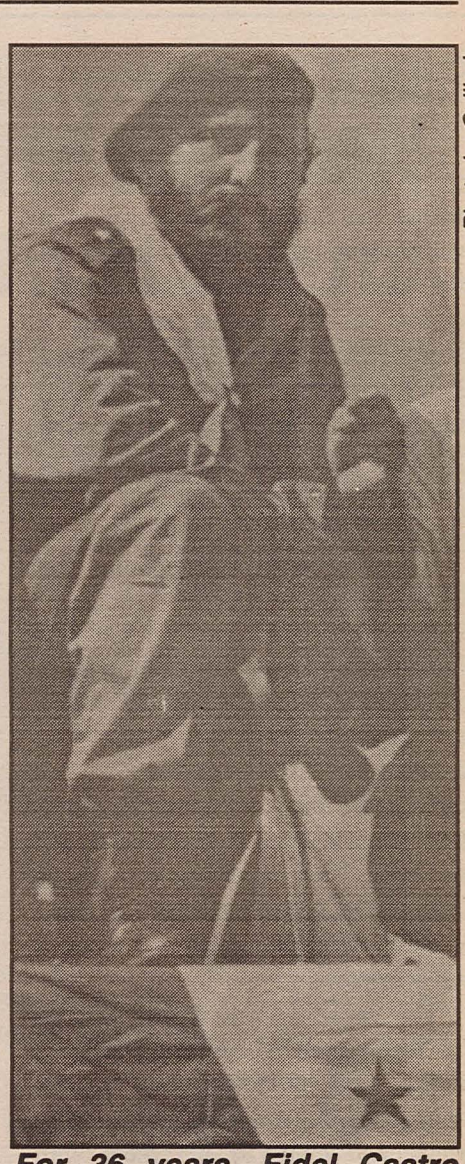

Photo by Collier's

For 36 years, Fidel Castro and Cuba have been a thorn in the side of U.S. diplomacy.

Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem, long famous for leadership in civil rights struggles. (Parts I and II of Mr. Castro's speech were printed in the December, 1995 and April, 1996 issues of the *Commemorator.* Part III appears in this issue.)

In spite of the blockade, the United States has not hemmed in the island nation effectively, as is clear by the continued flow of people to and from the island, and the continued flow of commerce. Blockades are only entitled to recognition under international law if they are totally effective.

International criticism of U.S. policy

U.S. efforts to obtain international condemnation of Cuba, much less any action against Castro's government by any other nation, has resulted only in the U.S. adding another degree in its attempt to enforce through legislation its 34-year-old embargo against Cuba. The U.S. came up against the demand that any declaration would also criticize the U.S. role in perpetrating the situation. It is well known internationally that operations like that of Brothers have been flying out of Miami in planes claimed to be "civilian," while actually working under the CIA for some forty years in Latin America and the Caribbean, to drop leaflets, run reconnaissance, deliver weapons and troops to fire a few rounds.

The international rejection of the U.S. "blockade" can be summarized in the words of no less than former French President Mitterand, who in the last year before his death called it "stupid." It has been criticized by every major state. When the U.S. tried to bring charges against Cuba to the General Assembly over the downing

Continued on next page

Continued from previous page

of the two emigré planes, it met a universal condemnation of the blockade instead. But the blockade is not complete. Goods flow to Cuba through Canada and Mexico, which in fact makes the blockade not legal by international law.

The "Brothers to the Rescue," who provided the publicized motive for the latest tightening of the blockade, have made the so-called Cuban "boat people" their issue. They claim to be of a humanitarian, nonviolent, civil-rights tradition like Martin Luther King's movement, but have no documented history consistent with this claim.

Back to Harlem

The small island so close to the United States has made its priorities things like literacy for all and universal health care, despite its imposed poverty. Fidel Castro shook the State Department to its foundations in 1960 when he spoke on the balcony of the St. Theresa Hotel to the people of Harlem. Last October, he did it again. Appearing in New York for the U.N. ceremonies, he spoke at the Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem, received a very warm response, and told the truth about what Cuba has done for its people and the people of other third world countries, including what it did to fight the racist regime in South Africa, a story never told in the U.S. press.

He told his Harlem audience how Cuba had gone from 6,000 doctors before the revolution down to 3,000 when half went to the U.S. for better salaries and better conditions. Since then, the number of doctors in Cuba has climbed to 60,000. He spoke of the 15,000 doctors his country has sent to third world nations, mostly in Africa and Latin America, saving hundreds of thousands of lives. He offered the United States similar aid, "if one day the North Americans need doctors . . . if in some corner, some neighborhood there is no doctor."

Cuba is in desperate need of capital to do things like purchase medicines, and has recently opened up its enterprises for foreign investment, with two limitations: that foreign ownership be less than 50 percent, and that there will be none in the areas of vital interests, including national defense and health care.

Mr. Castro does not attack the United States government, but a certain grouping and the question which finances and supports "Brothers to the Rescue" and similar operations. This grouping is documented to include powerful figures in finance, in criminal enterprise, and in the intelligence community; the very same grouping involved in the Bay of Pigs, the Kennedy assassination, the Watergate break-in, President Nixon's resignation, and hundreds of assassination plots against Castro.

"Brothers to the Rescue" is flying again. No one in the U.S. has addressed the fact that they had filed a false flight plan to cover a flight over Cuba in the first place, and that they had failed to fly over the Bahamas as planned. A speech was made by a state department official warning them that their licenses would be pulled if they did it again, but they have already violated the law, repeatedly.

U.S. President Clinton has subsequently signed the so-called "Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity Act," which permits Cuban-Americans to sue foreign companies that "benefit from their expropriated property," an unprecedented and highly unconstitutional procedure, vehemently being protested by the European Union, for example, which threatens retaliatory trade actions against the United States.

Unprecedented international trade agreements — similar to the NAFTA provisions between the U.S., Mexico and Canada — have been signed by many Latin American governments with the U.S. over the past few years, that have significantly lowered or eliminated tariffs for international trade between and with these countries, and thereby seek to render Latin America into an expansive free trade zone, maximizing profits for international monopoly capital. The Cuban government refuses to participate in these policies, and continues to state that it will never sell off its population as slave labor for international capital. The Cuban government declares with each public statement that it will continue to fight the forces that would deny its political sovereignty.

Fidel Speaks

Continued from page 9

enumerate in figures the suffering of four and a half billion human beings in the Third World, the billions in ignorance, hungry, people below the poverty level, uneducated, in bad health, without anything; when I see so much suffering I remembered, when brother Butts was speaking, a history of legend of a Cuban Indian, the Indian Hatuey who, with that conqueror spirit with which the Spanish came to Latin America, with the cross and with the sword — you should understand that the cross cannot be introduced through the sword — [Hatuey] rose against the conquerors and they condemned him to burn at the stake. And when he was at the stake they told him that there was a heaven and that they wanted to baptize him so that he went to heaven. Then the Indian asked if the Spaniards were going to heaven — he hadn't said whether or not he wanted — and he said: All right, then I don't want to go to heaven (APPLAUSE AND EXCLAMATIONS).

In the same way there is in this world many who talk to us of heaven, in this world so full of abuse and so full of injustice. And in that way I could say: We don't want to go to that heaven that you practice in this world, we want to go to a heaven of justice and of human dignity (APPLAUSE); we want to go to a heaven of brotherhood, and in that heaven do I believe and for that heaven I am prepared to give my life.

Many thanks (APPLAUSE AND EXCLAMATIONS OF "Fidel, Fidel!")

Cruising Law Targets Black Youth

Oakland CA — On Sundays the Oakland police surrounds Lake Merritt and pull over anyone who passes their station more than once in a two hour time span. If the person can't prove that they live in the area, they'll be hit with a $103 fine. This is another way the city government extracts money from the Oakland black and working class community, while downsizing, and cutting back service programs and jobs. The Lake Merritt is one of the few places where young people from working class communities can get together on weekends. It is a beautiful gathering ground for the community. Unfortunately, the powers-that-be have decided that if you're young and black you will become the subject of harassment from an all too powerful police force.

— Terry Cotton (Oakland resident and former Black Panther Party member)

HUD Fraud, Deception

Continued from page 5

phia. It wasn't what they were doing; it was who and where they were.

MOVE, which was characterized as an eclectic, back-to-nature group by the official press at the time of the bombing attack, including lies in the press about the presence of incendiaries other than officials' own, was literally demolished by the government for nuisance violations, just as Rodney King was attacked for a moving vehicle violation. Abie was removed for daring to organize dissent to government policy. The lack of government accountability for the viciousness of their responses leaves low-income communities nationwide murmuring — or shouting — "No justice, no peace."

***Commemorator* gets out the facts**

The *Commemorator* is the first minority newspaper I've seen that has been getting out the facts concerning the case of Mumia Abu-Jamal, supporting justice in the situation through building organization, which no instant outpouring of people is going to change by itself. For people like Mumia or Abie the injustices are intolerable. Abie would have been dead if not for organization. They had to fight, which is why the other side tries to crush and kill them. They will try to use it either way by manipulation of the masses on the terrain, they own the media, the courts, the prisons. If they kill him, they can advance by suppressing reaction. If they let him live, they can still rob us of material gain, just as they have robbed all our communities down to nothing!

Faced by either organized mass mobilization or spontaneous action, they still own the means to extinguish or divert it. Only through organization can we take back the material productive means of survival for ourselves as a people. That's what the Abies and the Mumias and the Martin Luther Kings keep saying. If it seems like a voice crying in the wilderness when that dream eludes us, we must not bide our time, lick our wounds or wait on some single tactic, but get with a daily involved practice of organization now, that is as systematized as the forces of reaction arrayed before us.

In Struggle,
John L.M. McDonnell

Black Political Power

Continued from page 3

tricts off the map. Georgia's 11th District, held by the brilliant and progressive young Representative Cynthia McKinney, was eliminated by judicial decree, based on a challenge to its configuration, as an "unconstitutional boundary."

McKinney, responded to the U.S. Supreme Court opinion which abolished her district by a five to four vote, stood in front of the Lincoln Memorial in the District of Columbia, saying, "The ability of African Americans to participate in the political discourse of this land was severely curtailed in governmental bodies of all levels." She likened her case to the dark, repressive line of Court precedent marked by *Dred Scott v. Sanford* (1857), and *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), a time when the Court validated white supremacy and attacked the notion of Black civil activity.

"For Georgia," explained McKinney, "the period [of the exclusion of blacks from political office] was more than 100 years — from the service of Jefferson Long to the service of Andrew Young."

Shortly after McKinney's seat was abolished, another Georgian, Stanford Bishop, found his seat eliminated.

Earlier this year, Louisiana's Cleo Fields found his district ruled unconstitutionally drawn.

The war on Black life in America is waged on all levels, from those seemingly at the "highest" levels, to those at the lowest, a dream deferred yet again.

What is needed is Black revolutionary political power, tied not to the established, but to the will of the many, the disenfranchised.

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Get Rich -- Build Prison

Continued from page 6

increased from 23,511 to 216,140. The state has built 20 new prisons. "This is the largest prison construction program in the nation's history," said Franklin Zimring, Director of the Earl Warren Legal Institute at Berkeley.

Geoffrey Long, the chief consultant to the state assembly's budget committee, said California will spend more this year on prisons than for its two university systems: the University of California and the California State University.

The new law mandates a prison sentence of 25-years-to-life for third-time offenders.

This, in itself, gives proof of the real values of our politicians. They are more concerned with incarcerating our children than educating them. After all, it's a flourishing $31 billion business.

With this latest, called, "Three Strikes You're Out," private companies like AT&T, GE, and American Express are cashing in with investments in the prison industry. Companies that build and manage prison facilities are making billions of dollars annually. As incarceration rates continue to climb, the quality of inmate care and rehabilitation declines, and taxpayers increasingly foot the bill. There are even firms being established to broker prisoners between systems that are experiencing overcrowding and those which have empty cells.

Expansion and Money

According to Craig Brown, undersecretary of the Youth and Adult Correctional Agency, the "Three Strikes" law will necessitate 15 more prisons by the year 2000. That's a cost of $4.5 billion just to stay at the current 185% capacity.

A Rand Corporation study has projected that if the "Three Strikes" law is fully implemented, by the year 2002 the Department of Corrections will consume 18% of the state's budget, with only 1% for universities.

Prisons have become a valuable commodity, and the government is doing all it can to get more.

The clash between spending for prisons and spending for education is taking place in many states around the nation.

At the rate in which the prison population is growing, it will not only equal that of our students now enrolled in U.S. colleges and universities, but will surpass the entire population of New York City — currently about 7.3 million.

No other industrialized country on this planet incarcerates its population at such a staggering rate.

"We have a very strange and undesirable kind of civilization if we consider prisons more important than higher education," said Sen. Nicholas Petris, D-Oakland. We are destroying and enslaving our people for the profit of the few.

As we begin to see more laws being constructed to guarantee jails and prisons are filled to capacity, we also see more and more privatization of prisons. Most of these contracts are awarded on a per-prisoner, per-day basis. It encourages incarceration rather than rehabilitation.

In an amendment sponsored by Sen. Jesse Helms and passed without debate by both houses of Congress, the bill seeks to limit the power of federal courts to impose remedies in prison overcrowding suits where constitutional violations result. "A federal court shall not hold prison or jail crowding unconstitutional under the 8th amendment," regardless of whether it causes the infliction of cruel and unusual punishment of inmates. They don't care how full the jails and prisons get. Each prisoner has a price on his or her head, and that price puts steak on the table for the wealthy who demand prisoners live under inhuman conditions while they are forced to work. Under those circumstances, good paying jobs in our communities are disappearing.

Social Devolvement

"Clearly, as a vehicle for providing for the safety of its citizens, the explosive growth of California's prison system has been an expensive failure," Mark Kotting and Vincent Schiraldi wrote in their report in "Singapore West: The incarceration of 200,000 Californians."

As California stubbornly shovels tax dollars into a failed correctional gulag, violent crime defiantly rises. Since the early 1980's, the state has spent about $5 billion on "the largest prison building program in the United States." The total crime rate and the violent crime rate are both higher now than they were in 1983, before all this prison construction started.

The "Three Strikes" mentality is the latest indicator of foolish public policy regarding crime control. The "Three Strike" law gives the appearance of toughness on crime, but does nothing more than bankrupt the state without seriously reducing crime. It will eventually go far beyond the estimated 50 more prisons by the year 2000.

This money, in a sense, will come from the steep annual fee increases that students in the University of California and California State University system face each year over the next decade.

Allocations for higher education come from the remaining 10% of the state budget that's unprotected. The other 85% to 90% is locked up under constitutional and statutory mandates. According to Stephen Caroll, senior economist of the Rand Corporation, "If state spending on higher education continues to fall at its current rate, in 10 years, the UC and CSU systems would have to turn away another 180,000."

Strapped for money, educators are wondering why Governor Pete Wilson is taking so long to accept $42 million from a federal program that is supposed to help schools improve academic standards.

Wilson was notified in July that the money was available, but he hasn't made a decision, despite prodding from state Superintendent of Schools, Delaine Eastin. It could be that he needs this money to pay off bills the "Three Strikes" bill has created. This delay comes at a time when schools are scrambling for funds and the state is 40th in per-pupil spending. The $42 million is available under the federal government's "Goals 2000" program, which supporters describe as a virtually string-free effort to help schools develop their own programs to raise achievement levels.

Today's Dream -- Tomorrow's Nightmare

According to the California legislative Analyst's Office, "Three Strikes" will require at least 15 — and maybe as many as 38 — new prisons over the next five years.

Senator Petris took note of those balances earlier this year when he introduced legislation to establish a university closure commission; he said, "If we open a prison, we have to close a university campus."

Wilson administration officials argue prison spending is a sound investment that will make the state safer. California still had the nation's fifth-highest crime rate in 1993. While California ranks near the top in prison and crime, it is below average in most education categories. It ranks 43rd in percentage of high school students who graduate on time, 48th in elementary school class sizes and 46th in funding for public higher education.

In a report entitled "Trading Books for Bars: The Lopsided Funding Battle Between Prisons and Universities," Vincent Schiraldi of the Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice argues that the shift toward prison funding is shortsighted and counterproductive.

"For the cost of incarcerating one prisoner for one year, California can educate 10 community college students, five California State University students or two University of California students," he wrote. "This means that the decision to impose a 40-year sentence on one "Three Strikes" petty thief is a decision to forego 200 two-year community college educations."

Those whom the state is catching in the Three-Strikes net are petty thieves and minor drug offenders. Over 70% of those getting 25-to-life sentences are not charged in their third offense with a serious or violent felony. Petty theft is stealing something that has less than a $400 value, like a piece of pizza.

Do you want your children in one of the latest of technological prisons or in a dying educational system? If you don't, say something soon, the choice will not be yours to make.

McBride Fights, Wins

Continued from page 9

officers were acquitted of the beating of black motorist Rodney King in 1992. After the city erupted in sometimes violent protests, widespread subpoenas of video tapes and other journalistic records by zealous prosecutors led most protesters to view reporters as an arm of the police rather than an objective third party.

"I couldn't do that and continue to live with myself," he said. "I would be a traitor to my profession – journalism – if I ever allowed either a lawyer or a judge or the horses they rode in on, to compel me to give up materials protected by the First Amendment. They should never have requested the stuff.

"Even though Jane Tucker, my lawyer provided by the American Civil Liberties Union of Mississippi, urged me to comply with the modified order from Judge Lee, I refused to give any information beyond my identity as the reporter of the November 7 story and to verify whether I actually wrote selected lines attributed to Mr. Brinston.

"They aren't screwing with a journalistic virgin," stated McBride, who holds a B.A. degree in Journalism from Cal State University at Los Angeles. He also has a Master's degree in Language Studies from San Francisco State University, class of 1975.

With more than 29 years of writing experience in California and Mississippi, McBride has faced the harsh jackboot of the state before. Arrested in 1962 on the "white" side of the Trailways bus station in Jackson, he was cited for insisting on his right to purchase a ticket to his hometown of Vicksburg. While on assignment for the *Advocate* in 1985, McBride refused to show police officers his identification papers after being arbitrarily stopped on Moss Point's Main Street. He was arrested and charged with disorderly conduct. A fifty-dollar bond allowed him to escape that town without a court appearance.

"Medgar Evers got me out of jail in 1962," he said. "I was a close friend of his from my student days in Vicksburg and at Tougaloo. I cherish that friendship, and whatever I do in the field of civil and human rights, I trust will always be in the spirit of Medgar Evers."

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CCBPP STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The Commemoration Committee for the Black Panther Party (CCBPP) is committed to the goals of the Black Panther Party (BPP) as outlined in its Ten Point Program which was written in 1966 by Party founders, Dr. Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale.

The Ten Point Program outlines goals and objectives toward changing conditions of economic exploitation and political oppression in all low-income and working class communities in the U.S. and elsewhere, as the basis for unity and solidarity.

Also, the CCBPP is committed to the concept of Revolutionary Intercommunalism, introduced by Dr. Newton in 1970 at Boston College. Revolutionary Intercommunalism holds that there are basically two sides. On one side there is reactionary intercommunalism which presently holds the world's low-income and working communities under conditions of economic exploitation and political oppression by controlling the wealth, resources and institutions in order to maximize profits for the few. Huey identified this side as the leading reactionary side (the ruling class) which consists of a minority, fewer than five percent of the world population. Under these conditions, reactionary intercommunalism, by and large, keeps the poor and working communities on a cycle of degradation, under conditions of reaction, desperation and poverty, with no end in sight. Newton understood that in order to change these conditions and advance the economic and cultural interests of these oppressed communities of the world, disciplined organizations must be built from the bottom up, enabling these low-income and working communities to fight exploitation and oppression by any means necessary (this fight needs to start in the advanced industrialized U.S. because our nation leads the world in political reaction and economic exploitation).

CCBPP advances and upholds the goals which the BPP outlined in its Ten Point Program, and those goals are about ridding black ghettos and low-income and working communities of economic exploitation and political oppression, understanding that we can reach these goals only by seizing the time at the point of practice.

Black Panther Party 10-Point Program

WHAT WE WANT, WHAT WE BELIEVE

1. WE WANT POWER TO DETERMINE THE DESTINY OF OUR BLACK AND OPPRESSED COMMUNITIES. We believe that Black and oppressed people will not be free until we are able to determine our destinies in our own communities ourselves, by fully controlling all the institutions that exist in our communities.

2. WE WANT FULL EMPLOYMENT FOR OUR PEOPLE. We believe that the federal government is responsible and obligated to give every person employment or a guaranteed income. We believe that if the American businessmen will not give full employment, then the technology and means of production should be taken from the businessmen and placed in the community so that the people of the community can organize and employ all its people and give a high standard of living.

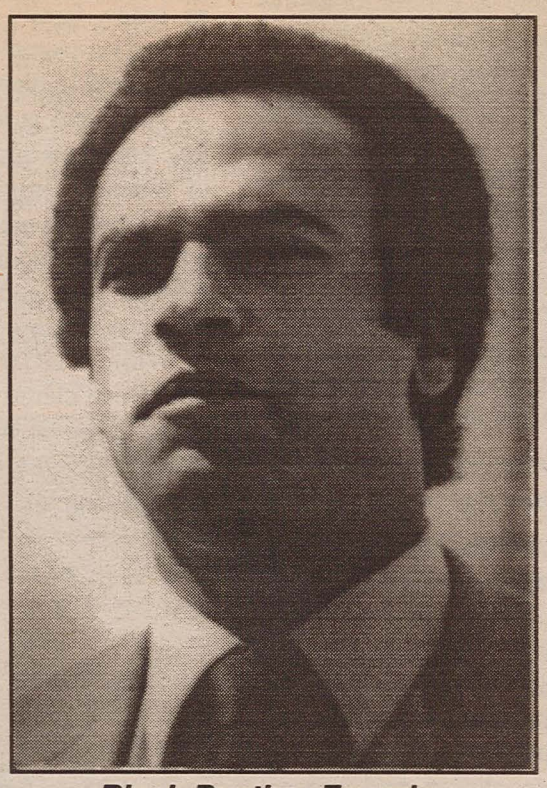
3. WE WANT AN END TO THE ROBBERY BY THE CAPITALIST OF OUR BLACK AND OPPRESSED COMMUNITIES. We believe that the racist government has robbed us and now we are demanding the overdue debt of forty acres and two mules. Forty acres and two mules were promised 100 years ago as restitution for slave labor and mass murder of Black people. We will accept the payment in currency that will be distributed to our many communities. The American racist has taken part in the slaughter of over fifty million Black people. Therefore, we feel this is a modest demand that we make.

4. WE WANT DECENT HOUSING, FIT FOR THE SHELTER OF HUMAN BEINGS. We believe that if the landlords will not give decent housing to our Black and oppressed communities, then housing and the land should be made into cooperatives so that the people on our communities with government aid, can build and make decent housing for the people.

5. WE WANT EDUCATION FOR OUR PEOPLE THAT EXPOSES THE TRUE NATURE OF THIS DECADENT AMERICAN SOCIETY. WE WANT EDUCATION THAT TEACHES US OUR TRUE HISTORY AND OUR ROLE IN THE PRESENT-DAY SOCIETY. We believe in an educational system that will give to our people a knowledge of self, If you do not have knowledge of yourself and your position in the society and the world, then you will have little chance to know anything else.

6. WE WANT COMPLETELY FREE HEALTH CARE FOR ALL BLACK AND OPPRESSED PEOPLE. We believe that the government must provide, free of charge, for the people, health facilities that will not only treat our illness, most of which have come about because of our oppression, but will also develop preventive medical programs to guarantee our future survival. We believe that mass health education and research programs must be developed to give all Black and oppressed people access to advanced scientific and medical information, so we may provide ourselves with proper medical attention and care.

7. WE WANT AN IMMEDIATE END TO POLICE BRUTALITY AND MURDER OF BLACK PEOPLE, OTHER PEOPLE OF COLOR, ALL OPPRESSED PEOPLE INSIDE THE UNITED STATES. We believe that the racist and fascist government of the United States uses its domestic enforcement agencies to carry out its program of oppression against Black people, other people of color, and poor people inside the United States. We believe it's our right, therefore, to defend ourselves against such armed forces and that all Black and oppressed people should be armed for self-defense of our homes and communities against these fascist police forces.



Black Panther Founder, Dr. Huey P. Newton

8. WE WANT AN IMMEDIATE END TO ALL WARS OF AGGRESSION. We believe that the various conflicts that exist around the world stem directly from the aggressive desires if the U. S. ruling circle and government to force its domination upon the oppressed people of the world. We believe that if the U. S. government or its lackeys do not cease these aggressive wars that it is the right of the people to defend themselves by any means necessary against their aggressors.

9. WE WANT FREEDOM FOR ALL BLACK AND OPPRESSED PEOPLE NOW HELD IN U. S. FEDERAL, STATE, COUNTY, CITY, AND MILITARY PRISONS AND JAILS. WE WANT TRIALS BY A JURY OF PEERS FOR ALL PERSONS CHARGED WITH SO-CALLED CRIMES UNDER THE LAWS OF THIS COUNTRY. We believe that the many Black and poor oppressed people now held in U. S. prisons and jails have not received fair and impartial trials under a racist and fascist judicial system and should be free from incarceration. We believe in the ultimate elimination of all wretched, inhuman penal institutions, because the masses of men and women imprisoned inside the United States or by the U. S. military are the victims of oppressive conditions that are the real cause of their imprisonment. We believe that when persons brought to trial that they must be guaranteed, by the United States, juries of their peers, attorneys of their choice and freedom from imprisonment while awaiting trials.

10. WE WANT LAND, BREAD, HOUSING, EDUCATION, CLOTHING, JUSTICE, PEACE AND PEOPLE'S COMMUNITY CONTROL OF MODERN TECHNOLOGY. When, during human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands that have connected them with another, and to assume, among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the laws of nature and nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation. We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. That, to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed; that, whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute a new government, laying its foundation on such principles, and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to affect their safety and happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and, accordingly, all experience hath shown that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But, when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same object, evinces a design to reduce them under absolute despotism. It is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such government, and to provide new guards for their future security.

Feds Slam Door on Poor

Continued from page 1

yet HUD is in the middle of an eight-year plan to spend over $25 billion to tear down 100,000 high-rise apartment buildings nationwide. In total, about 10 percent of public housing construction from the '50s and '60s are targeted for demolition. With homelessness rising to unprecedented levels among working families, HUD's programs plan to reduce the number of public housing units by one-third.

High-rise to garden apartment?

The federal government will spend $300 million to demolish 3,500 housing units in five public housing complexes in Newark through the high-rise changeover to "town houses." To replace approximately 3,500 units, federal, state and local officials pledge to build only 2,400 apartments scattered over 50 to 60 sites, leaving at least 1,000 families with no replacement housing.

> ***"4. We want decent housing, fit for the shelter of human beings. We believe that if the landlords will not give decent housing to our Black and oppressed communities, then housing and the land should be made into cooperatives so that the people in our communities, with government aid, can build and make decent housing for the people."***
>
> ***— From the Black Panther Party Ten-Point Program***

In New Brunswick, New Jersey, Ann Conley of the Middlesex County Homeowners and Tenants Committee, says the Memorial Parkway Housing Projects there are slated for demolition, yet it isn't clear where families will be relocated.

New Brunswick Mayor James Cahill says 100 families will be accommodated in existing housing, and an additional 100 "garden apartments" will be built, while 46 are "expected" to purchase their own homes. However, he offers no tangible support for those expectations and the federal Section 8 program has accepted no new applicants, as their funding has been cut. The mayor, according to Conley, has no proposal for how to persuade landlords to lower their rents to affordable levels.

"We stopped them before"

"We stopped them from flattening these projects before through a massive letter and petition campaign. It is true they are condemnable, but we need to be sure the city isn't slipping another scheme through the back door. We must make sure the housing and relocation funds are ready and in hand before they start booting our people out," Conley explained.

Another longtime Memorial Parkway Tenant, Carrie Robinson, added, "They've been promising garden apartments since 1953 — when the projects were originally built. Not one has been built, why should we believe them now? Empty townhouses abound in the area — the problem is not available housing but affordable housing. The government wants to destroy the projects because they are $8 million in debt and federal housing laws do not ordinarily permit demolition without adequate replacement housing. So the government makes promises they cannot and will not keep, to encourage tenants to keep silent and not organize to fight for their legal rights."

Homeowners and renters unite

In Orange County, California, residents of several privately owned government-subsidized housing complexes formed a Renters, Homeowners and Residents Committee to fight arbitrary rent increases, lack of repairs and harassment from security guards — including physical assault. Many tenants there are complaining of roach and rat infestations, and are being charged $75 late fees when their HUD rent subsidies don't arrive until five days after the rent is due, in violation of federal regulations, which allow for a ten-day delay in payments directly to the apartment owner.

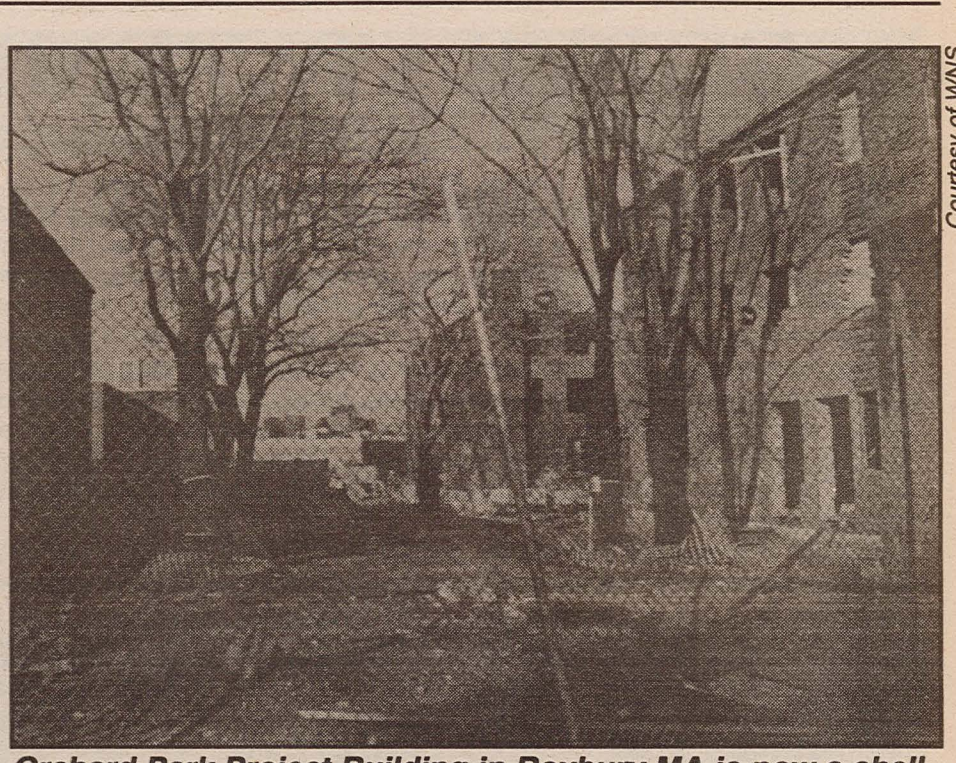
Despite threats against tenants the manager observed attending committee meetings, this self-help effort has resulted in repairs, and some extermination of pests, although residents report much more comprehensive eradication efforts are needed, as well as an end to harassment on the part of the private security guards, who have physically threatened and even assaulted tenants to enforce an unlawful after-dark curfew to the point of the guards stopping children playing with balls or carrying out garbage after 8:00 p.m.

Meanwhile, Baltimore has joined the mass demolition of homes of the poor with a vengeance. Under a federally funded plan, 40 buildings in four public housing projects will be eliminated and Baltimore will make itself the first city to eliminate all its public high-rises.

Land under projects is now prime real estate

In Chicago, Mayor Richard Daley plans to knock down eight of 23 of the Near North Side's HUD-controlled Cabrini Green Public Housing Towers, using $1 billion to transform them into "mixed income" townhouses, condominiums, new schools, a new library, police station and grocery store, in a combined public and private development program. Local residents claim this is a self-serving prediction. With $1 billion, existing facilities could be upgraded. They complain services have been withheld to provide a pretext for demolition.

The Chicago plan represents a loss for Cabrini's poor residents — only 30% of the new housing will be allocated for the poor and low-income. Said Richard M. Wheelock, speaker for a Cabrini Green tenant's organization to the *New York Times* of June 29, 1996, "This represents a wholesale destruction of a low-income African-American community . . . and is representative of a larger attack against public housing and poor people across the country."



Courtesy of WNS

Orchard Park Project Building in Roxbury MA is now a shell of a building. There used to be twice as many families living in Orchard Park. They were moved out years ago. "When people move back in after 'renovations,' It won't be poor people because these projects are now run by private developers," stated one former Orchard Park resident.

Empowering notorious local authorities

Republicans and Democrats alike have produced new public housing legislation which will allow many local housing authorities, already notorious for arbitrary evictions and poor maintenance and upkeep of their apartments, increased legal discretion toward tenant management and evictions, clearing the way for President Clinton's "one strike" eviction guidelines. Under the "one strike" policy, an entire family can be summarily evicted on suspicion that one member is engaged in illegal activity.

This "one strike" eviction guideline represents another in a long series of federally inspired HUD removal and redevelopment profit schemes, where low-income and minority workers lose, and insiders, corporate investors and developers win.

While HUD official Kevin Marchman claims the one-strike policy is no threat to working families, saying, "If you're not engaged in criminal activity, you have nothing to worry about," it will allow for eviction of entire families, no matter what age, based only on suspected illegal activity of any individual family member. Neither formal arrest nor conviction will be necessary for wholesale eviction.

Waiving constitutional rights

The one-strike policy violates constitutional rights, leaves the poor effectively without legal recourse to homelessness, while serving the all-important purpose of running more and more families out of public housing altogether.

Almeter Hollace, who leads community canvasses based out of the Vivian Cooper Community Service Center in Trenton, New Jersey, told of the effects of policies like this on the community. "Closing down public housing goes hand in hand with other policies geared to squeeze more money out of low-income workers. Whether it is single mothers forced to work three and four jobs, or entire families conditioned to distrust their neighbors or even their own family members in order to protect their housing, the result is harmful to both individuals and the community. We are made to take others' jobs at lower pay, or have nowhere to go but the streets. We're not leaving anyone behind, that's why we need everyone out there on the canvass drive."

A cash cow

Whether run by Democrats or Republicans, HUD has always been a cash cow for everyone but people living in HUD housing. Today, there is more profit closing down public housing than maintaining it.

In San Francisco, HUD has supposedly paid out millions of dollars over the last 20 years for "maintenance work in area HUD housing." Nevertheless, the steady deterioration of construction, painting, plumbing, electrical outlets, etc., continues.

> ***"Day and night, the neighborhood is harassed by police. Whenever people congregate they get harassed. I've received five tickets on my truck in one week. They want to get rid of us so they can make money. People are moving to the East Bay because when they apply for housing in San Francisco and tell the landlord that they are from the projects, San Francisco landlords will not rent to them. So they are forced to leave the city," stated Mr. Ike Pittman, who has lived in a Hayes Valley apartment for 20 years.***

Having spent $10 million a year over 20 years, there were over 17,000 unfilled maintenance orders in the San Francisco Housing Authority, according to *Commemorator* sources. In Hayes Valley, projects are being demolished and the residents removed.

Just as Republicans never talk about the poverty and unemployment

Continued on next page

Continued from previous page

behind much of America's crime problems, President Clinton and Henry Cisneros will not talk about HUD's unilateral health, security and safety problems of ceilings that leak, toilets that don't flush, dead electrical outlets, and cockroach and rat infestations. Clinton and Cisneros will not talk about these problems, because to do anything about them would bring the administration into head-to-head confrontation with the very banking and developing institutions that profit from these projects, and finance the politicians' campaigns in return.

Profitable investments

Private profit by insiders from public housing is commonplace. In San Francisco, Cynthia Choy Ong, Deputy Attorney General for the state, recently purchased real estate in Hayes Valley, where two projects are currently being demolished and surrounding real estate prices are skyrocketing. At the federal level, Julian Fitzhugh, HUD Director of Public Housing, purchased investment property across the street from the soon-to-be razed, HUD-controlled Hayes Valley Housing Project. But the profits to be made by these in-the-know investors is dwarfed by those of larger developers, many of whom are tied together by a little known nationwide company operating government subsidized housing from coast to coast through a variety of local affiliates.

Related Company/Related Management of Newport Beach, California, ties together 45 affiliated companies, from New York to Florida and California, with assets totaling over $1 billion. Every major urban center has a Related Company making profits from building and/or "maintaining" HUD public housing.

Bill Witte, who in 1982 became Deputy Mayor for Housing under then-San Francisco Mayor Dianne Feinstein, immediately took the opportunity to set up Related Housing Inc. in San Francisco, and issued a public stock offering worth $578,000. In-the-know buyers of the stock were not worried about their investment, because they also knew the Related connection offered the safety of the nationwide assets of the entire operation.

Misusing blighted areas law

Under former San Francisco Mayor Art Agnos, Bill Witte was Executive Director of the Housing Authority; Agnos is now director of HUD's Region 9, which includes San Francisco, where the Related Company, fronted by Bill Witte, is set to profit from the demolition of the Hayes Valley North housing project.

Another Related company, Bridge Housing Financial Group, is a New York corporation, but its local front Ted Dienstfry, is also Executive Director of the San Francisco Housing Authority. It was Ted Dienstfry's Bridge Group, including local politico Dean Macris, that won a HUD contract to build new public housing under the name of the Bernal Heights Housing Corp.

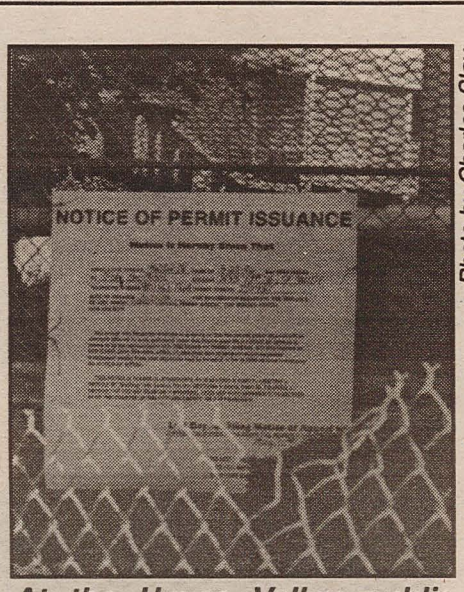


Photo by Charles Slay

At the Hayes Valley public housing site in San Francisco, the city and Nibbi Brothers Construction have already begun preparation for the removal of apartments to be replaced by townhouses.

Back in Trenton, New Jersey, Almeter Hollace charges that New Jersey's Blighted Areas Act of 1949 is being used contrary to its purpose to pave the way for a new hotel, conference center and sports arena. Communities decimated by HUD and urban renewal drives are left an easy prey, she charges. "If a single building is below code, it is possible to have the entire block blighted. The intent of these schemes is not to benefit the majority of residents but to lure others in for personal profit with no lasting economic benefit to any."

Gilbane Construction Co., which is positioned to bid for the contract to build the arena, had its own property management subsidiary do a study to show the sports arena complex would be financially viable. But New Jersey Committee to Reconstruct president Fern Batson predicts such a complex would fail within three years' time. "The study claims a 2.5-million-person target grouping with a median income of $56,000 within a 30-minute radius," said Batson, "but we've lost 10,000 jobs in Trenton and 10,000 more in surrounding Mercer County within the past year alone. The study also says nothing about the number of permanent jobs becoming temporary, and the drop in wages and benefits within all strata of the population."

Rural poor hit too

Daily rental rates on state-subsidized farm worker housing in California, which really subsidize the low wages paid to harvesters and other seasonal workers, were doubled this year from $3.50 to $7.00 per day throughout the state, without effective notice to migrant farm workers who depend on returning to these apartments each year when work becomes available. As a result, tenants in Yuba County, near Sacramento, lost confidence in the official poverty law agency, California Rural Legal Assistance, and filed their own suit to stop the rent increase going into effect. CRLA, without consulting the workers, had agreed to let the state collect the rent increase while negotiating whether it was legal or not.

"This increase affects only migrants and is therefore discriminatory," said Edgar Diaz, longtime Yuba City resident and activist. A volunteer attorney who assisted the migrants in preparing their case, said that the measures increasing the rent also changed the workers' status from tenant, which has some legal protection against retaliation and unfair evictions, to resident, which has no legal protection.

Atlantic City

Until this year, HUD, based on its own regulations, had to replace, one for one, any unit of HUD-funded housing. In Atlantic City, New Jersey, however, the 40-year-old Pitney Village, a 333-unit public housing project will soon be replaced by 50 townhouses, once the funding under these new regulations comes through. Two-thirds of the units were boarded up two years ago under the guise of renovation.

In Atlantic County 20 to 30 years ago, private developers built low-income housing with HUD funding, and were obligated to offer reduced rents for 40 years, with the option of buying out their obligation in 20 years. But, when Pleasantville, New Jersey's Ridgewood Avenue Apartments (subsequently named Ridgewood Parks), a privately developed HUD complex, converted to "fair market value," 60 of 80 families were evicted within one month because they couldn't afford the new, higher rents.

According to a 1991 study done on affordable housing, Atlantic County has available 1% of what it needs. Said one local organizer, "It's like 100 people playing musical chairs with one chair, in terms of housing needs going unmet."

In Boston, five housing projects are designated for rehabilitation, and residents are being moved out, on the basis they'll be able to return. But many are distrustful. In two instances in Boston — Mission Main and Orchard Park Project — a tenant task force approved plans, including architectural drawings for renovation. However, these plans have been rejected, and redevelopment has begun without resident or community input, in violation of HUD's own regulations.

Also in Boston, under HUD's Demo-Dispo Program, Grant Manor, Mandela, Canfield Gardens and Roxe Homes, are being rolled into open market units, mostly cooperatives.

Nationwide, funds are now leveraged through this conversion process despite official promises of "affordable" rent, creating systematic displacement of the poor, 75% of whom are minorities. "This is a form of genocide of the poor and oppressed communities," stated *Commemorator* editor Melvin Dickson, "and must be stopped."

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Assata Shakur

Continued from page 3

oppressed. It's just that simple. There is no way, after all that we have gone through and all that we are going through now, that we can sit down now and logically tell ourselves "I am a citizen of the United States government."

We are victims. And some of us who have some economic means are less victimized than others, but we are all victimized by a racist inhumane system that does not put people in any important category. It's like poor people die.

"Since we are mainly poor people, they're talking about us. And I don't care how many movies they can put on television about middle class Blacks or so-called or Black cops or Black sergeant who is now a stereotype on television, that does not reflect our reality. Poverty reflects our reality."

— Assata Shakur

Proposition 187 in California is a proposition that is so immoral. You're going to tell those people, "Don't bring your kid to the hospital." What the Republicans are proposing is quite clearly taking poor peoples' food away. Saying to pregnant mothers, "No. You're poor. I'm sorry. Too bad. Your baby can't have any help. No nutrition." Saying to school children, "Sorry. If you're poor, tough. No lunch."

Since we are mainly poor people, they're talking about us. And I don't care how many movies they can put on television about so-called middle class Blacks or Black cops or a Black sergeant who is now a stereotype on television, that does not reflect our reality. Poverty reflects our reality. And I think that we also have to understand that in order to struggle we've got to be in shape to struggle. And I'm not talking just about physical shape, but we have to be in mental shape, have a mental capacity to struggle, a physical capacity to struggle and a psychological capacity to struggle.

What I mean by that is that we have to understand that we are victims of a drug war. Either we can play into that and say, "I'm sorry. It's just too hard for me to live in this United States of America. I have to be high all the time." Because they are setting that condition of thought.

African communities are plastered with every ad from Seagram's to Miller beer to every kind of alcohol, cigarettes, and there's this whole mentality, a whole environment set up to say, "Look, what you need to do is have an escapist mentality. You can't fight us, so get yourself a beer. Get yourself drunk. Get yourself some crack. You must be dependent on something."

And that message is beamed out to our children from the time they're one, two years old. "You can't do anything about this society. You can't fight city hall. You're helpless. You're hopeless. You better go get yourself some drugs and kill yourself."

We have to start dealing with this. How can I live in the society and deal with this pain? We live in this society and don't deal with the question of the pain of dealing in this society. It is very painful for African people to live in the United States of America. It is very painful for oppressed people to live in a country that is totally hostile.

That is painful. It is painful to go in the store. You go in the store and the minute you go in the door the store detective is walking behind you. You go in the bank and they look at you like, what are you doing here? You're here to rob me.

You go down the street and the cop wants to stop you for nothing. On your job, many people go to work every day to a hostile job environment and try to pretend that it's not hostile.

Kids go to hostile schools that are like warehouses and try to pretend that the indifferent teacher isn't as indifferent to them as she really, or he really, is.

So I think we have to recognize the terrible amount of pain that we're dealing with and look for healthy ways to counteract that. The only way we can do that is by building. I think that one of the things that we have to do is rediscover some of the things that worked during the high point of our movement. And I think the reason that many young people were attracted to the movement in the '60s was that solidarity that African people had. It wasn't just that we were outraged at the oppression. That was part of it.

We were also attracted to the togetherness of it, to the beauty of it, and I think that we have to rebuild that.

We want to build a society that values life because we live in one where life has no value and where we're taught over and over that your life is nothing. That human beings are nothing. And that the only humans on this planet that matter are rich people riding around in limousines and white people with Lady Clairol blond dye jobs; these are the kinds of values that are constantly beamed at us.

I think that the only way that we can struggle effectively is to say we don't want violence. That doesn't mean that we don't believe in protecting ourselves. That doesn't mean that if it comes to that we're negating our right to pick up arms. But, I'm saying that should be the last thing that we're talking about right now.

What we're talking about right now is hooking up together. It's unity. It's discovering who we are because if you think your history starts on the plantation, then you can't draw from that African strength, from that African beauty, from that African wisdom, from that African unity.

I seriously believe that we live in a society where cavemen with computers run that country and try to run the

Photo by Michelle Uribe

"I think one of the things that we have to get over is this minority mentality."

planet. And the wave of racism that's going right now is not only in the United States. It's all across Europe. And the message is the same. It's the same angry white male message.

The message is, "We don't want the Africans or the Latinos or the Caribbeans or any poor people coming here and taking our jobs." What the bottom line is, is white skin privilege.

Angry white men are nothing new to our existence. We were robbed from Africa by angry white men. We were enslaved . . . by angry white men. We saw the angry white men with sheets on. We saw them in white citizens' councils. We see them now in the White House. Angry white men are nothing new to our experience.

I think one of the things that we have to get over is this minority mentality. I think it's really doing us a lot of damage. I think that world-wide people of color are the overwhelming majority.

The same people that are oppressing our sisters and brothers in Africa, Asia and Latin America are the same people that are oppressing and exploiting us. I think that makes us have some idea that our natural allies are other oppressed people on this planet. And it becomes quite clear that who we have to deal with, is the common oppressor, is imperialism. United States imperialism, British imperialism, French imperialism, the extent of corporate imperialism.

The common link that we have as oppressed people is anti-imperialism, anti-exploitation, anti-racism, anti-sexism. Those are the things that bring us together.

I think that we need to think about who our natural allies are and start to realize that we are not the [minority], not on this planet, and within a short time in the United States we will not be the minority. In less than 50 years the majority of people living in the United States will be of third world origin. We need to start elaborating a strategy which deals with that.

We have the possibility to struggle and to win and to change the reality of the United States government. It is possible. That is the objective.

So what we need to do is create within ourselves the ability to do that, which means we have to educate ourselves. And when I say educate I'm not talking schools because there's a big difference between instruction and education. The schools can only instruct us in reading, writing, math, et cetera. But politically, we have to educate ourselves. Morally we have to educate ourselves. Historically we have to educate ourselves because your oppressor is never going to educate you.

The most you can demand of an oppressor and of oppressive situations is instruction. I think we have to make a clear distinction between the two.

Instruction is to give you orientation to work within a political situation. Education is dealing with the concepts of reality.

Real history — we're not taught real history in the United States school system. We're taught some fantasy history that doesn't deal with the oppression of African people, doesn't deal with the oppression of the different indigenous nations, that doesn't deal with the oppression of Asian people or of Latin people... You cannot bring up a child in the United States to be sane, to be healthy, unless you put that child in reality and say, "We are a family that is oppressed."

And that is why, instead of looking at Mickey Mouse for eight hours, we've got to sit down and learn who Langston Hughes. . . and Nat Turner were.

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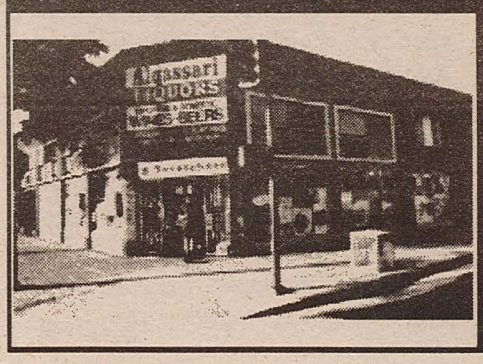

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